

CONFessions
OF A
TENDERFOOT

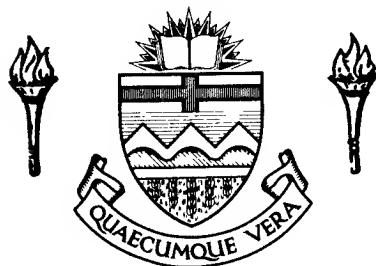
By
RALPH
STOCK

CONFessions OF
A TENDERFOOT
By RALPH STOCK

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**THE CONFESSIONS OF A
TENDERFOOT**



Frontispiece

“SEVEN LITTLE NIGGER BOYS . . .”

THE CONFESSIONS OF A TENDERFOOT

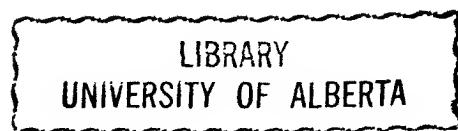
BEING A TRUE AND UNVARNISHED ACCOUNT
OF HIS WORLD-WANDERINGS

BY
RALPH STOCK

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS REPRODUCED FROM
PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

LONDON
GRANT RICHARDS LTD.
MDCCCCXIII

WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON, LTD., PRINTERS, PLYMOUTH



TO
MY BROTHER ARNOLD
IN MEMORY OF OTHER DAYS

224179 

I AM indebted to the proprietors of *The Captain* and
The Wide World magazines for their permission to
include in this volume articles of mine that have
appeared in their pages.

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I

BAPTISM BY FIRE

To be a pioneer is commendable, exhilarating, and often disagreeable. To be a "tenderfoot" is necessary for all of us at some stage in the game of life, often humiliating and always expensive; but when one is both I can vouch for the result being a combination of adversity and fortune, joy and despair, sufficiently conflicting to satisfy the craving of the most insatiable seeker after excitement and novelty.

For the past ten years Canada has enjoyed a phenomenal and continuous boom; but in 1901 it was at its height. London was plastered with flaring posters representing fields of yellow grain and herds of rolling fat stock tended by cowboys picturesquely attired in costumes that have never been heard of outside the covers of a penny dreadful. Unctuous gentlemen met you in the street with six-page pamphlets imploring you to come to such and such an address and hear of the fortunes in store for the man of initiative who would take the plunge and emigrate to Canada. What chance was there, then, of the average city youth, cooped in an office from nine o'clock until six, resisting such an appeal

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to the imagination that lies dormant in most of us ? At any rate, in this year, with a fresh complexion, a fresh idea of my own importance, and two trunks of very fresh and, for the most part, unnecessary paraphernalia, including the inevitable six-shooter and combination pocket-knife, " without which," as the obliging shop-walker at —— and Company's had assured me, " no Canadian outfit was complete," I landed at Maple Creek, a little prairie town sprouting from the plains like a night's growth of mushrooms.

There were no porters to seize my traps as I stood on the tiny platform, feeling, and I'm sure looking, like the proverbial fish out of water ; no cries of " Keb, sir ? "—only a vast, almost penetrating silence.

At first I thought I was the only occupant of that platform, dumped down, as it were, on the wide-spreading prairie, for all the world like a dis-used packing-case turned upside down. On looking round, however, I discovered a short, thick-set man, with a face the colour of red ochre, surmounted by a stiff, wide-brimmed felt hat, the crown of which was decorated with four dents at opposite angles. A gay-coloured scarf, tied in a tight knot, adorned his neck, and a black leather jacket, dark blue linen trousers, turned up at least four inches, revealing high-heeled riding-boots and spurs, completed his costume.

At last ! This must be a real live cowboy. I

was at once deeply interested, and I'm afraid my scrutiny must have been anything but timid, for to my astonishment he walked straight up to me.

"Anything I can do, stranger?" he said, in a friendly tone, accompanied with a broad grin that was vastly reassuring.

"No, thanks," I said, and then changed my mind. "Well," I added, "I was just wondering if I could find a porter, or someone, to carry my bag to the hotel."

"Gee!" he remarked irrelevantly. "Here, give me your grip."

I naturally thought he wanted to shake hands with me, and could hardly see the connection; but he explained matters by catching up my handbag, swinging it on to his shoulder, and starting off in the direction of a gloomy-looking log structure across the road.

He deposited his burden inside the door, and with a gruff "There you are, pard," was about to walk away when, like the "tenderfoot" I was, I produced a quarter and held it out to him.

It struck me he was unusually dense, for he stared stolidly for a second or two with a look that seemed to say, "I suppose the poor guy can't help it," and finally turned on his heel, with a queer smile in the corner of his mouth. I grasped the situation just in time.

"Well, you'll have a drink?" I suggested humbly

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“Thanks,” he said, in a mollified tone, and we approached the bar.

I learnt many things about Western etiquette at that bar; among others, that a man with “a white wall around his neck” (*Anglice*, collar) is in no way superior to one who wears a light blue scarf with yellow spots. It was also a relief to know that my new-found friend had excused my initial error on account of my extreme youth and ignorance.

There were many faces in that bar-room, all weather-beaten and brown, and all bearing the unmistakable stamp of good nature. They belonged to a crowd of cowboys, broncho-busters, and ranchmen from a hundred miles round, and a more jovial, rough-tongued, but thoroughly good-hearted community one could not meet.

My companion and I found a quiet corner and discussed the war. Our interests were mutual, for we discovered that we both had brothers in the same regiment at the front, and we were getting on famously when suddenly the door opened abruptly and an insignificant-looking little man appeared, dressed in the usual rancher’s costume. He was rather breathless and perspiring freely.

“Fire south of Pia Pot Creek,” he shouted; “wind rising; all turn out!” and then made for the bar.

There was an instant stir in the assembled crowd. Some made for the door, some loitered, unwilling to move. The latter were summarily dealt with.

"Turn out ; you know the penalty !" said the new arrival sternly.

One by one they obeyed the summons ; some cheerfully, others grumbling.

"Are you going to turn out ?" asked the inspiring little man, addressing me.

"Where ?" I asked lamely.

He must have seen I was a "tenderfoot," for he was merciful, though short.

"There's a prairie fire way out south of Pia Pot Creek," he explained. "I'm a fire-guardian, and it's my duty to fetch anyone within ten miles to fight it. If they refuse there's a penalty of fifty dollars to pay. You can get a lift in a police wagon if you haven't a horse. Now skip lively !"

At this point he took a deep draught of beer and heaved a sigh as if of relief at having disposed of his stock oration.

I looked helplessly for my companion. He had vanished. Outside the door, however, I saw his face, smiling as ever, at my approach.

"You're let in for it, pard—and your first night up West, too !" he remarked sympathetically. "You'd better come with me ; I can borrow a cayuse and a saddle for you."

In less than a quarter of an hour we were in the saddle, alternately loping and trotting over the prairie towards a red glare which showed far away on the southern horizon.

My interest was now fully aroused, and even the

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uncertain movements of my Indian-bred cayuse could not baffle me.

“W—what s—tarts a p—rairie fire?” I inquired, between the back-breaking jolts, as we trotted along.

My friend, like most cowboys, was full of information, and not in the least loath to part with it, for which I was relieved, as, for my own part, talking was a matter that needed no little management.

“Oh, lots of things,” he replied, in an unshaken voice, that might have proceeded from the recesses of a deep arm-chair. “The sparks from an engine, ashes from a pipe, or a match thrown away while it is still glowing. Why, I’ve known even the sparks from a horse’s shoe striking a stone to start a fire! But lightning starts more fires than anything else—not an ordinary storm, but just lightning and thunder without rain. We often get them out here.”

By this time we had brought our horses to a walk, and I could speak with less difficulty.

“Do you get paid at all for turning out like this?”

“Not a cent,” was the prompt reply; “but you have to pay fifty dollars if you don’t. You may spoil all your clothes trying to fight a fire, and yet you get nothing back. It’s the worst job in the country. It makes you wish you were a doctor or a chemist for a week—they don’t have to turn out.

But you'll learn all you want to of prairie fires to-night."

We loped on, passing police wagons filled with willing helpers, single men on horseback, and a few unfortunates on foot, all making for that sinister red patch that grew brighter every minute.

The wind was rising, and the air was slowly becoming more and more smoke-laden. My companion looked annoyingly comfortable sitting there for all the world as though in a rocking-chair, while I swayed from side to side, with my trousers—contrary to all the laws of gravitation—slowly working up my legs in a most irritating fashion.

Flames were now discernible, flickering out through huge billows of black smoke. A faint crackling, too, could be heard, growing louder and louder, till it merged into a dull roar, and soon we saw figures running hither and thither, silhouetted blackly against a blood-red background.

At last we came to a sudden stop, my cayuse halting almost simultaneously with my companion's and nearly shooting me over the horn of the saddle.

After dismounting I found myself gazing at the proceedings in a dazed sort of way, while my companion, with practised fingers, hastily tethered our horses to a police wagon. Then he took a long oilskin coat from behind his saddle.

"Haven't you got a slicker?" he remarked. "You'd better see what you can get in the wagon," and he disappeared into the smoke.

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I made for a little group of men with blackened and perspiring faces, who soon supplied my wants.

“Here, take this,” said one. He thrust a stick into my hand. Round the end of this several sacks soaked with water had been wound. “You’ll find more water in the wagon,” added the man.

There were about twenty men at the fire when I arrived, but now the numbers were rapidly increasing, and soon there were at least forty, all tramping and beating for dear life, but apparently in vain. The fire spread like spilt quicksilver. The thick prairie grass came up to my knees in places, and the wind was rising steadily, fanning the flames in an alarming fashion. I beat and beat at the running lines of fire with my improvised mop till my arms felt like parting company with my body. Every now and then I would beat a retreat, running to the wagon and wetting my mop in a barrel of water that was kept filled from a creek three miles away by a couple of industrious teamsters who had been commandeered with their wagons by the zealous fire-guardian. Once I was so absorbed with my mopping that I was nearly run down by a couple of horsemen, one on each side of the line of fire, who were galloping along pell-mell, dragging between them a wet cow-hide loaded down with chains. They, again, were closely followed by a crowd of beaters waiting eagerly for a spark or flame to escape the hide to

thrash it into submission with "slickers," mops, sacks, old saddle-blankets, and even hats.

By this time, "green" though I was, I was scorched black and perspiring freely, but the fire still spread inexorably. It was now ten miles long, and had left ten miles of burnt and blackened prairie in its wake. It seemed hopeless to attempt to keep it back, and after a final "whack" at a flame that promptly seemed to increase instead of diminish, I gave up in despair and joined the ever-increasing number of exhausted "sitters-out."

All that night we fought the flames—an hour at work, sometimes two, and then five minutes' rest—until I thought I should have dropped dead with fatigue. Once the fire approached a haystack. A plough was promptly produced from a wagon, and in ten minutes a fire-guard of four furrows was cut around it by four horses and two men working at a hand-gallop. A small gully filled with brush next fell a victim. The dry branches crackled and roared furiously as the fire ran up them and passed relentlessly on, leaving nothing but blackened stumps behind.

It soon became apparent to everybody that if the wind did not change an adjacent stockman's ranch would be the next thing to be destroyed. Of course, it would be protected with a fire-guard of, perhaps, seven furrows; but what is that to a fire that will sometimes leap a well-worn trail twelve feet wide? Needless to say, the owner of the ranch was with

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us, and I shall never forget with what frenzied energy the poor fellow fought to save his home ; beating at the cruel flames like one possessed. But, thank heaven, the wind was decreasing—almost imperceptibly, it is true, but still enough to put fresh vigour into our aching bodies.

Sometimes a fire will travel fifty miles an hour, and no other alternative is left to a person on foot than to jump the fire line—the area that is actually burning—a distance of several feet, and land on the charred grass beyond. He is then obliged to do a little more jumping until the ground grows cool enough for him to stand still on. No one was compelled to resort to this appalling practice that night, and I was somewhat relieved, for it did not look inviting.

Suddenly, as I worked, I felt something wet splash upon my forehead. Of course, it must be a drop of water from the mop, I thought, and I continued my thrashing in the mechanical sort of way I had acquired during the last few hours. But another splash came, and another ; then they came quickly, one after another. I had been too intent on my work to take note of the sky before : but now I looked up and saw that it was black with clouds. Nearly everyone was resting from his work and gazing intently and anxiously at the sky. Rain ! Yes, thank heaven ! It was coming at last, and we hailed it with grateful hearts, for it is the only certain quencher of a prairie fire.



THE FIRE GUARDIAN OF MAPLE CREEK



MY FIRST BUNCH

I say it rained; but it did not. It simply fell down in solid sheets of water, and in less than five minutes the fire was out. Nature had accomplished in that short space of time what the hand of man had failed to do in a night and half a day.

There was no smoke and no flame left—only one black pall covering the prairie further than the eye could reach. But in less than a month after its destruction that same black waste was green again, such is the richness of the prairie soil.

II

MY FIRST BUNCH

THE acquirement of his first "bunch" of cattle, be that "bunch" ne'er so humble in proportions, is to native and "tenderfoot" alike the event of a lifetime. It gives him added importance, at least in his own estimation. He is at once a rancher, a man to be respected, a man with something substantial behind his back, something of flesh and blood that is daily increasing in value.

To a new acquaintance he can refer with studied indifference to "my bunch up in the hills"; he can mark his "slicker" and other belongings with his brand instead of his initials; in fact, he is an old stager at a bound—of course, as I said before, in his own estimation.

When the "needful" arrived from England that was to lift me with one hoist, as it were, into this exalted position, I was in a "tenderfoot's" worst stage of greenness, that stage when, after having been in the country a month or two, he imagines he knows everything worth knowing, and has come to the conclusion that the necessary experience so much talked of in connection with ranching

is not half so hard to pick up as he had been led to expect.

I was "cow-punching" on a ranch situated near a small river rejoicing in the classical cognomen of **Dirt Creek**. I may add that it was not far from **Stinking Lake**. The Indian method of christening their country was nothing if not appropriate.

Ted, the foreman, had just returned from town with a batch of "mail" warranted to break even the monotony of herding for an hour or two.

He also brought news of a newly arrived car-load of "dogies" that "looked pretty slick." Dogies, it must here be explained, are cattle from down East, Manitoba principally, and in consequence of being inferior to North-West range stock, and proportionately cheaper, they have a pretty ready sale among the speculative who rely on the rich grazing of the North-West to bring their stock up to their rivals' level.

I had no sooner heard the news and examined the contents of my registered letter just received, than I determined to take the header.

The next item was to get a "day off," which the boss readily granted. My brand, which I had received from the Agricultural Department at Regina about a week previous, was 3T—, and the same evening I made arrangements with a rancher for the loan of his corral for the branding, and also his hired man to help. So far so good. I flattered

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myself I had a business head, and with swelling bosom slept that night to the imaginary lowings of twenty fat dogies.

The next morning saw me hitting the town trail “on the high places only,” to use a cowboy phrase intended to express speed; and at six o’clock I was standing in a muddy corral trying to look as much like an old hand as possible, while I scanned with critical eye a bunch of some two hundred and fifty head of cattle.

This one was too long in the flank, that one had no breed in him. I always had some crushing remark ready for each beast the dealer pointed out as being specially attractive. At last, however, twenty were picked out.

“Well, how much do you want for them?” I asked, after beating round the bush in, as I thought, the most approved buyer fashion.

“Four hundred dollars,” was the reply.

“Thought you wanted to sell them,” I remarked with bitter sarcasm, and turned on my heel. This, I had heard, was a sure method of bringing down the price. Of course, the dealer ought to have run after me and made some new proposal. But he didn’t. To my consternation, I heard no sound of approaching footsteps behind.

By stages I had at last reached the corral gate and lingered there a moment, to all appearances to light my pipe; but curiosity overcame dignity, and I looked round. There was the dealer seated

on the fence talking and laughing with a friend, apparently forgetful of his recent loss of a four-hundred-dollar chance !

I felt, somehow, that I was the subject of their mirth, and, of course, it made me savage ; but that settled it, the dogies must be worth their money. It was horribly against the grain, but in the end I was obliged to do it. I retraced my steps with as much dignity as I could command, and in ten minutes I was outside the gates minus four hundred dollars and plus twenty bony-looking cattle.

“ Going far with ‘em ? ” inquired the dealer good-naturedly.

“ Up to the hills,” I answered.

“ Better get someone to help drive ; might be troublesome.”

I never answered a word. It was below my dignity. Who knew most about dogie driving : a full-fledged cow-puncher or a mere dealer from the East, where they walk after their milk cows for fear of risking their precious necks on a broncho ?

It was a grand morning, with just enough wind to keep off the mosquitoes. My cayuse was fresh, I was fresh, all the world was fresh, and all too fresh to last ; I had a vague presentiment of it.

I followed the well-worn trail to the hills, and for the first two or three miles my dogies went like so many sheep. I passed several buggies, the occupants of which invariably seemed to look upon my bunch with favour, but I did not stop. They might

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ask what I had paid, and somehow I felt I might possibly have given too much, and then they would —well, it wasn't any of their business, anyway.

Only five more miles, and, encouraged by the rapidly decreasing distance, I tried to trot. From that moment my troubles began.

The cattle would separate out in a most exasperating manner, and one or two started trying to be original by standing stock still until sent off at a gallop, heels in air, by a cut with my "quirt."

My cayuse began to puff. Running backwards and forwards behind obstinate cattle is one of the most trying duties of an Indian cayuse, and for this they have to be well trained.

I began to get hot. I also began to lose my temper. One roan steer especially aroused my ire. He *would* bear off to the left, forsaking the trail altogether, and standing like a monument to look at his companions with a superior air that seemed to say, "Well, you are a tame lot, not to give more trouble; can't you see you've got a 'tenderfoot' behind you?" And the worst of it was, they seemed to understand, for a more rebellious bunch than mine for the rest of the drive it would have been hard to find.

I was rapidly becoming desperate. I inwardly called Ted names for saying he had driven a hundred head to Pia Pot ranch alone, a month ago. I resented the appearance of black clouds on the eastern horizon, knowing full well what that meant

in Canada. I abused my poor little cayuse for not turning quicker, and finally dismounted and sat down on the prairie to think, and it was as well I did.

Suddenly it struck me like a thunderclap that I didn't in the least know where I was.

Oh, you may think I was a drivelling lunatic, but I'll guarantee that if I took any one of you self-possessed Londoners, who had never seen the prairie before, and after leading you a few hundred yards from a well-worn trail, turned you round twice with eyes shut (though this precaution would be hardly necessary), you would no more know the way back to the starting-point than a Canadian backwoodsman would if suddenly dropped in Piccadilly Circus, or in the "Tube."

Not a tree, not a stone, not a single landmark, everything exactly the same—yellow grass as far as the eye can reach.

I remembered, too late, the advice I had received on being sent for the mail on my second day of cow-punching : "Never leave a trail unless you know the country you are travelling."

My dogies grazed quietly on. Trails had no attraction for them. I envied them their herbivorous natures, for by this time I was becoming conscious of an aching void in the vicinity of my waistcoat. Then, like an idiot, I lost my head. It is surprising how easy it is to do this under the circumstances just described.

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I galloped about to right and left : I tried to stand on the saddle to get a better chance of seeing the trail, and nearly lost my horse in consequence, for he bounded forward from under my feet, of course at the critical moment, and it was only by the merest accident that I happened to keep a hold of one of the lines.

Then the mosquitoes started their tortures. Have you ever had so many of these pests on your face and hands that you cannot sweep away one consignment before another is in its place ? If not, you have never been on the prairie of the North-West just before a rain storm. I squashed and squashed until my face was a veritable mass of black dots. I remember it occurred to me even in the position I was then, that I might possibly be able to crush enough to make a protective layer of squashed mosquito. All the elements were determined to lay me low that day. Next came the rain—a Canadian rain—a rain that will extinguish a prairie fire a mile long in five minutes ; but I blessed it, for it would also extinguish mosquitoes (while it lasted).

Of course, I was soaked to the skin in three minutes ; a “tenderfoot” would never think of such trifles as “slickers” before starting out for his first bunch. Then I sat down and waited—I don’t know in the least what for—but I waited, while my dogies munched quietly on, getting farther and farther apart. I didn’t care : they



A TYPICAL CANADIAN COWBOY



ROPING CATTLE FOR BRANDING

might go to Jericho if I could only find that trail. Hadn't someone said, "If you get lost, light a fire and wait?" Then I laughed. I saw the joke for the first time, though in all conscience it was feeble enough. "Light a fire!" What with? Not a stick, not a bush, only tinder-dry grass that at a touch of a spark would become a raging fire miles in length and land its originator in for a fine of fifty dollars.

At last the storm was over, and utter stillness reigned in its stead, except for the buzzing of the everlasting mosquitoes which were now double as bad as before, until broken suddenly by the following, rendered in a deep bass that could have proceeded from no other throat than a cowboy's :

"Then beat the drums slowly and play the fifes lowly,
And sound the Dead March as you bear me along;
Take me to the valley and roll the sods o'er me,
For I'm a wild cowboy who knows he's done wrong."

That was all I heard at the time, and I remember the words pretty distinctly yet.

I jumped to my feet and into the saddle. Yes, there he was, coming gaily along, not half a mile distant. I could hear the thump, thump, of his horse's feet—sound carries so distinctly on the prairie. I literally galloped towards the approaching figure, who seemed greatly surprised when I came up with him.

I saw, just in time to save giving myself away, he was riding on the trail, and I had not

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been a quarter of a mile from it for the last two hours. I had ridden in every direction but the right one.

“Er—er—have you got a match?” I inquired breathlessly, not able to think of anything better at the moment.

“Guessed you wanted the doctor by the tear you was in,” he remarked, as he handed me the matches.

“I’m a bit late,” I faltered; “got some dogies over there, and they’re troublesome to drive.”

“Let’s have a see if I can help,” he said, with the usual good nature of his kind; and in less than ten minutes we were on that disappearing trail, whooping, yelling, and “quirting” the dogies along at a good jog-trot.

Suddenly my companion came out with a most unlooked-for piece of information.

“You shouldn’t get off a trail if you don’t know the country; you might have got in a worse fix.”

I tilted my painfully new cow-puncher hat a little more over my eyes, shut my teeth, and swallowed the advice. How on earth had he guessed I was lost? It was most embarrassing; and we rode on in silence, until with a cheery “So long, see you again sometime,” my companion struck out at right-angles to the trail, and started to lope across country.

The rancher whose corral I had hired for the

branding was, to say the least, candid, for when I arrived at the gates he scanned my bunch with critical eye, and then simply said :

“ What did you give for them ? ”

“ Twenty dollars a head,” I answered, at the same time thinking it “ confounded cheek ” on his part.

“ Oh ! ” was all he said.

Then he turned to his hired man : “ You can light the fire now, Jim.”

The fire was soon crackling merrily on the top of two branding-irons—a bar and a half-circle.

In the meantime the rancher saddled his horse, and we were ready to start.

Jim and I stood waiting by the fire while the rancher gave a shake to the bridle-lines and rode straight through the bunch of cattle towards the largest, my friend the roan steer, swinging his lariat in a circle at his side as he went. The steer became excited and broke into a trot, then a gallop with heels in the air.

It would have been as well for those heels if they had kept on terra firma, for the next moment the noose left the rider’s hand and they came down in the centre of that deadly ring of rope as though it had been their owner’s most earnest intention to do so.

Of course, this all took place in the space of a second ; indeed, so quickly is it done that it is over before you realise the fact, and you find your-

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self wondering how the rope managed to get in such a curious position.

Next, a quick jerk backwards from the rider, and those two hind legs are as one, and the frightened steer is swaying like a pine in a high wind. The rope is then wound round the "horn" of the saddle, and the rancher starts his horse in the opposite direction to the steer, which falls with a thud as its legs are pulled from beneath its body, and lies with heaving ribs, while Jim promptly sits on its head and holds its horns.

They evidently imagined I knew what to do next ; what a pity to disillusion them, but it was necessary.

"What shall I do now ?" I asked lamely.

"Bring along the half-circle, sharp."

Of course, I pulled out the bar first, but that was soon remedied.

"Left ribs, you said, didn't you ?" asked the stockman.

I wasn't aware that I had said anything ; but I thought it as well to acquiesce.

"Yes—I think so," I said, not in the least knowing what he was referring to.

"Let's have a look at your papers," he demanded, rather shortly, as I thought.

He scanned the paper I handed him for a second, and then said a word that is not used in drawing-rooms.

"We've got the sucker on the wrong side, Jim ; let him have it," Whereupon he stretched the

legs still further out behind. Jim took the fore legs and a horn with each hand, and with a jerk and a pull the steer, for whom I began to feel a deep compassion, rolled over on to his left ribs.

“Hurry up ; that iron will be cold.”

With a feeling of secret abhorrence that I would not have shown for all the dogies in Christendom, I held the red-hot iron over the panting ribs. I nerved myself for the effort, and the next minute the hot iron was burning through hair and into flesh with a sickening hiss. The steer gave forth a dismal low, so human in its agony that it nearly made me draw away the iron.

“Gee ! ” exclaimed Jim of a sudden. “ You’ve put the half-circle the wrong way round ! ”

It was true, and I grew desperate.

“Here, you’d better work this racket : I’m rather good at sitting on their heads,” I exclaimed.

With a broad grin the hired man complied, and once again the dismal low of a suffering animal proceeded from the steer, but this time from right beneath me. I looked at the poor creature’s head, and the white of its eyes only was visible, while a white froth oozed from its mouth. Cruel things have of necessity to be done on cattle-ranches, and branding is one of them.

At last, to my relief, it was over. The 8T— was clearly marked on the ribs, the two half-circle irons making the 8, and, of course, the bar making the T. The rope was removed from the steer’s

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heels with much caution—a kick from a yearling steer is not coveted, even by a cowboy. At the same moment I sprang up from my living seat, and the steer staggered to his feet and trotted away to the bunch, where he was thoroughly examined by his companions, who sniffed at his still singeing brand with, apparently, the greatest satisfaction.

Thus the whole twenty were dealt with, some bawling louder than others, and some—who must have been specially popular among their comrades—were visited while undergoing the operation, and accompanied in their sufferings with sympathetic lows.

I watched them trot out of the gate and on to the open prairie, where they can range for hundreds of miles at will until “round up” in the fall, with a feeling that there were distinctly worse things than owning a bunch of dogies.



THE FINISHED BRAND



A PRAIRIE WATER HOLE

III

OUR LOCATION

TWENTY head of "dogies," however, be they fat or lean, good value or bad, are hardly a sufficient number to warrant building a ranch and setting up on one's own as a stock-raiser ; and so I handed them over to another to "run" for the term of three years that it would take for them to grow into beef at a charge of five dollars per head, while I continued the humbler work of a "hand."

For two years I worked on different ranches throughout the country, leading the usual strenuous life of the plains. In the spring, when the thawing snow and the bright sunshine coaxed the tender green shoots of grass from the lately frozen earth, enticing the cattle further and further away from their "range" in search of the succulent feed, it was my work to ride a given boundary and keep the stock from crossing it ; to visit all the muskegs (swamps) and boggy waterholes in which weak stock might get mired, and to help muster the cows and calves for branding.

In the summer, when the mosquitoes are rife and send the cattle drifting over the plains in a vain attempt to rid themselves of their tortures,

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boundary-riding with redoubled vigilance was my task ; or helping with the haying. In the autumn mustering the beef for immediate sale to the buyers who visit the ranches from the huge meat markets of the East and buy the animals live weight delivered in the nearest town, or for export to England. In the winter feeding hay to weak stock and again boundary-riding, often with frozen feet, nose, or ears, to prevent stock drifting away in a snow blizzard.

Such is the life, and despite its hardships it so appealed to me that when, at the end of these two years, I found myself in a position to take up stock-raising on a small scale, I took the plunge, and with a partner started out with two heavy wagons drawn by half-broken horses, and laden with tent, provisions, picket ropes, and all the ranch implements we could carry, to find a suitable location.

The snow had only lately melted from the level country, and in the deep coolies (valleys) there were still banks of it from five to twenty feet deep. In our eagerness to find a home and to get to work on our stockyards and buildings, we had started too early in the spring. We realised this when, after a day of apparently endless twisting and winding to avoid the snow-banks, we found we had covered only six miles.

Nothing daunted, we determined to trust to the drifts carrying the wagons, and set gaily out across the first we encountered. It bore us, and

we cheered. So did the next, and the next ; but the next——! In a twinkling, wagon, horses, partner, and provisions disappeared from sight as though the earth had swallowed them. The thawing snow underneath the top crust had given way.

It took the best part of that day to extricate the tangled mass of kicking horses, and cut them from the harness, collect the scattered provisions, and drag the wagon from its bed of snow with all the horses we had.

We kept to terra firma after that, but even then, what with the horses breaking picket ropes or getting "hobble wise" and decamping in the night towards their old ranches, it was two weeks before we reached what we considered a suitable location, fifty miles south of the Canadian Pacific Railway track. Untrampled grass, grass as far as the eye could see, a wooded coolie with a pebbly creek running down its centre, swift enough never to freeze to the bottom, sufficiently narrow to allow of the stockyards being built across it, thus forming an ever-full drinking-trough for a thousand head of stock ; a plateau each side of the valley bearing wild hay from six inches to a foot in height, and covering an area of five square miles without a break ; coal (as we discovered later) to be had for the digging in the hills not far distant, and timber in the deep valleys for the cutting. Such was our halting-place, a veritable stockman's Mecca, and if only the winters behaved themselves—if,

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but "if" represents a very small word and an infinite possibility. Stock-raising on a large scale is a speculation in almost any country, and the prairies of Canada are no exception.

Our first task after getting settled in our encampment was to build a pasture for the horses. To hobble and picket eight head of half-broken horses, and go to bed every night wondering if they would be there in the morning, was rather too wearing on mind and muscle after a hard day's work. As it was, it was through this last method of holding the horses that I lost my favourite cow pony. As I have said, we had started out far too early in the spring, and this was again proved when, after a day of brilliant sunshine, the thermometer suddenly fell to ten degrees below zero and the frozen snow of a North-West blizzard beat its tattoo on the tent.

Muffled in all the blankets and coats we could lay our hands on, we sat crouched close to the stove all that night, and in the morning the storm still raged, tearing and straining at our frail abode with such ferocity that we were finally forced to cling to the poles to keep the tent above our heads. To make matters worse, our provisions—the inevitable salt bacon and beans of the prairie—had reached vanishing-point, and it was quite impossible to cook what we had. During the three days and nights that the blizzard lasted we lived solely on tinned tomatoes, the one luxury we had hoarded

for Sundays. When it was possible to leave our posts at the tent poles, my partner, a cheery soul under any circumstances, set going a wheezy phonograph, from which nothing could part him, and to the strains of "Sunny Tennessee" or "The Wedding of the Winds," the blizzard tore on.

About noon of the second day we decided that although we could do nothing for the horses, we ought to see how they were faring, and forcing our way between the tent flaps which were frozen solid as boards, we fought our way towards them. Seven stood miserably hunched with tails to the wind in the slight shelter we had been able to find them behind a butte (small hill); the eighth, my cow-pony, lay stretched and apparently dead in the snow. However, she lifted her head and whinnied faintly at our approach and, after a long struggle, we succeeded in getting her on to her feet, though her hind legs were frozen almost stiff. Our one object for the next hour or more was to get her to the shelter of the tent, and this, by alternate thrashing and cajoling we succeeded in doing, only to see her pitch head foremost on to it, levelling it with the ground. A few minutes later she died, with her head on my knees. But enough of the miseries of a North-West blizzard—for the present!

It was two weeks after that blizzard before the snow had melted sufficiently to allow us to get into town with a wagon for provisions for ourselves and

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barbed wire for the field that was such a crying necessity ; but at last the journey was made.

When two strands of the fence were completed, we turned the horses into the field and, as a consequence, lost two of them. The prairie is noted for its rainless thunderstorms, and one visited us during our second day's work. Vivid flashes of forked lightning and deafening peals of thunder, but not a drop of rain.

My partner suggested that it might be dangerous handling barbed wire during such a storm, but in my eagerness to finish the work I laughed, and the subject was not mentioned again. The five horses we were not using, strange to their surroundings, and more than a little frightened at the storm, were bunched together in a corner of the field ; we could see them from where we were working. My partner had just started up the wagon team, and I was standing in readiness to give the signal to stop when the wire was taut enough, when suddenly a flash of lightning, the vividness of which I have never seen equalled even in the tropics, seemed to burst in my very face, to be followed by a peal of thunder that made the earth tremble. I happened to glance in the direction of the horses, and saw them scatter, necks arched and tails flying, as they galloped up the field. Then I saw what I took to be two of them left behind and lying down. Wondering at this, I called my partner's attention to it, and together we ran down the line of fence

to the spot, where we found two of our best horses lying horribly burnt and quite dead. The wire had attracted the lightning, and it was nothing short of a miracle that we had escaped ourselves.

It was just such a storm as this, a few weeks later, that crashed down on a survey party camped about twenty miles distant. When a search party of North-West Mounted Police arrived on the scene they found a collie dog belonging to one of the men sitting with pricked ears before the burnt remnants of a tent and four charred bodies.

The fence completed, we started to work on our house, a humble enough affair of pine logs cut in a coolie near by and designed for warmth and comfort rather than appearance.

No material has yet been found to equal the natural pine logs, plastered with lime and sand, for resisting the Canadian winter's thirty-below-zero winds and blizzards, and the houses of the largest ranches are usually built in this way. Sometimes an ambitious new arrival takes it into his head to strike out in a new direction, and teams bricks from the town, perhaps a hundred miles distant, or takes months to collect sufficient stone to build his house ; but when, during the first winter, with a red-hot stove in one corner of the room, he sees the frost glistening on the walls in the others, the spring usually finds him erecting at least a bedroom or two of the less pretentious but more accommodating logs.

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We already had the walls of our dwelling half completed, the ends of the logs roughly "squaw notched" or let into each other with a simple mortice, when a wandering band of Indians happened to camp on our creek for the night. I knew the Indian's dexterity with the axe, and that evening interviewed the wrinkled "buck," who was placidly smoking a pipe of cinicanick, a prairie weed, while his squaw, continually threading her way through a medley of dogs and children, prepared the evening meal of gophers and porcupine.

"How much you build house?"

"Ugh!" Silence.

"Dove-tail, no squaw notch."

"Ugh!" Silence. "Ten dollar."

"Done."

The next morning at four o'clock we were awakened by the sound of axe blows, and, struggling out of the tent, beheld our house, or half a house, razed to the ground, and the old buck mounted on one of the logs leisurely shaping our rude "notches" into something like symmetry. His skill was marvellous. Every blow did exactly its work and nothing more, and by night four walls, fifteen feet by twenty feet as true as a plumb line, though none had been used, the corners dove-tailed so neatly that it would have been impossible to press a half-crown into the joints, stood where on the previous day our combined efforts had re-



THE "BUCK" WHO BUILT OUR "HOUSE"

sulted in four walls of what had constituted an eyesore.

We gave him his "ten dollar," and invited him to supper of salt bacon, beans, and sour dough, but with a muttered "Ugh!" he returned to his gophers and his squaw. Who shall say that the North American Indian is not domesticated?

July was now approaching, and with it the most important work of the year, haying. How were we to run two mowers, a rake, and two wagons with five head of horses, and where were we to get more? That was the problem that now confronted us.

Of course, there were unbroken horses for sale in abundance on the large horse ranches—at a price; but the boundary-line between the United States and Canada was only eighty miles south of our location, and the price of horses on the other side of that line, especially in the States of Montana and Oregon, was nearly half what it was in Canada. The duty on horses imported into Canada from the United States was thirty per cent of the value of the animal, and the line was guarded by a squad of North-West Mounted Police, called the Flying Patrol. Why not take the plunge, invest in perhaps fifty head of horses and risk getting them across the line duty free? The only occasions on which the Patrol had been known to do any "flying" was when the mess bugle sounded. With a dark night and good saddle horses, the crossing

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of the actually dangerous zone would occupy an hour at the outside.

We reached Chinook, a prairie town of the stock-raising and mining State of Montana, in two days, and commenced to scour the county for horses. We found that report had for once spoken true ; good, heavy horses, and sometimes broken, were going for nearly half what they would fetch in Canada—if we got them there.

By the end of the week our fifty head were selected, and we hit for the boundary-line with pulses beating high. We camped at a spring about, as we thought, five miles south of the line, and waited for darkness. But it never came ; the day had hardly gone when a bright moon sailed into the heavens to mock us, converting the rolling plains into a vast silver sea.

Realising the hopelessness of attempting to cross under such conditions, we agreed to take it in turns to guard the horses, and graze them about the next day until night came once more ; if the moon repeated its annoying attentions then, we would make a dash, and trust to luck and the incompetency of the Flying Patrol.

At daylight next day we washed at the spring and rode to a hill about a mile distant to take bearings. Suddenly my partner threw his hat into the air, dismounted and executed a very fair imitation of the Highland fling, chiefly notable for the number and volume of its whoops. I asked what

he usually did for attacks of that kind, and the mystery was made clear. We were across the line ! We had crossed on the previous day in broad daylight, and at a walk. Where were the Flying Patrol and the hair-raising dash in the dark ?

For a full second I was positively disappointed.

IV

HORSE MAGIC

OUR next task was the breaking in of the horses we had so fortunately secured, the lighter ones to the saddle and the heavier ones to harness.

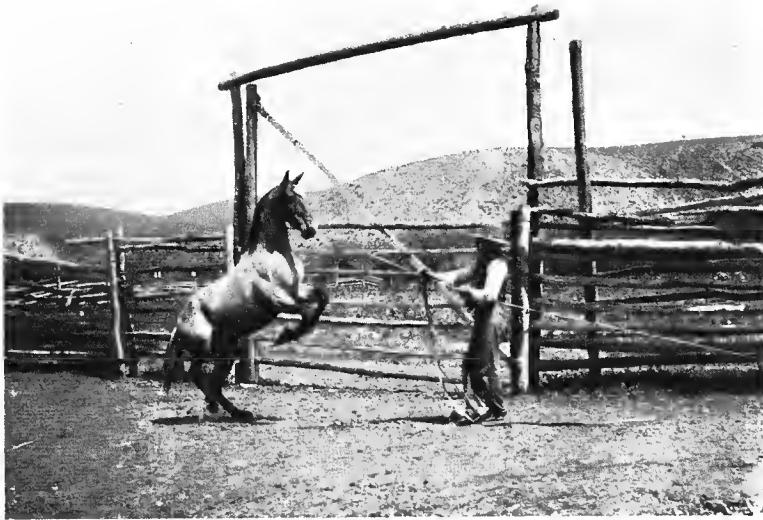
Streaming with perspiration, half blinded by dust, and clinging with numbed but tenacious fingers to the end of a hard twist rope, my partner and I were dragged round the corral for the second time.

“Let go,” gasped my partner. “We shall have to snub him to the fence.”

“And break his neck,” I suggested; “not much. Stay with it!” And again we made a protesting, ignominious circle, the ugly red roan at the end of the rope still untired, and still apparently revelling in the ease with which he could drag mere man in the dust.

“Why?” he was probably asking himself, “Why did his brethren capitulate to such feeble antagonists?”

But the feeble antagonists were fortified by the anger of humiliation and for a brief moment held their victim captive with legs spread wide, nostrils distended, and head held obstinately low.



"HAND OVER HAND, WITHOUT HASTE OR HESITATION . . ."



"THE DETESTABLE LITTLE MAN'S PUNY WEIGHT WAS THROWN ON
THE RAWHIDE ROPE . . ."

We breathed again, and my partner commenced to work his way gingerly up the rope towards the horse's head in approved fashion. In a flash it went up—and still up, and the fore feet with it striking frenziedly at the air and descending with a thud of obstinate defiance. Then, as though some fresh caprice had seized on its equine imagination, the horse turned, pirouetting on its hind legs like a ballet dancer, and dashed up the centre of the corral, leaving us seated in the dust.

"He's a corker," said my partner.

"He's the deuce," said I.

It was at this unfortunate moment that I became aware of our audience. He sat perched on the topmost rail of the corral in a blue shirt and tattered angora chaparejos, smoking a cigarette and not even smiling.

I nodded. So did he.

"Had dinner?" I queried.

He had not.

"Put your horse in," said I, and we adjourned to our fifteen-by-twenty Indian-built house.

Our guest spoke twice during the meal ; a fair average of table conversation for the Westerner ; then we returned to the corral.

The roan was amusing himself by trailing the hard twist rope at a gentle trot until it touched his heels, and then stopping to kick it viciously.

"Say," said the visitor in a weary drawl, "you want this plug broke, don't you?"

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We admitted that such had been our intention, though he might not have thought it from our efforts.

“Waal, I’ll fix him,” he said slowly, and without the least assumption, “you go and sit down some place.”

And we did.

He stooped leisurely and picked up the rope’s end, carrying it round to the small of his back with his right hand and grasping it firmly in front of him with the left. Then he braced his short, fur-clad legs and waited to be jerked into the dust.

But there was a vital error somewhere in our calculations. The jerk came, but the man stood firm, and the horse swung involuntarily round to face his adversary. He, too, seemed to doubt the evidence of his eyes—the thing was so obviously impossible. But again and again it was repeated, the frightened rush to right or left always ending in a sudden check and turn so that man faced horse.

Presently, hand over hand, without haste or hesitation the man felt his way up the rope towards the horse’s head, and with secret satisfaction we watched the roan answer these tactics as he had our own, rearing, striking with his fore feet, and descending with legs as unresisting as granite pillars. But the man had given no rope, and now he was half-way to the horse’s head, clear by perhaps a yard of the beating hoofs, and crooning

some horse language in a low, persuasive undertone.

The animal stood stock still, seemingly to listen, with ears pricked and legs set wide while the man's hand crept out and touched its nose, stroking it gently with a finger, two fingers, the palm of the hand, finally working up the side of the head to the tight-drawn noose about the neck, for all the world as one would tickle a trout. Very gingerly this was loosened, the slack rope formed into a loop, passed through it and over the animal's nose. And so, for the first time in his life, Mr. Roan felt the unwelcome pressure of a head halter.

He did his best to show his disapproval, but it was an easy matter to hold him now, and to pull him first this way, then that, protesting every foot of lost ground, but always forced to concede it at last.

The patience of the man was inexhaustible. At the end of a full half-hour's apparently fruitless "pulling," with slow movement and unruffled brow he would again feel his way along the rope to soothe the frenzied animal with murmured encouragement and gentle strokings.

The end came suddenly, as it often does. In answer to a more than usually severe "pull," the horse advanced two steps, stopped and took three more of its own accord. It had discovered that by this means it could not only slacken the pressure of the rope on its nose, but apparently satisfy

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the detestable little man with the furry legs, for he promptly turned a nonchalant back and strode round and round the corral with the horse following like a dog.

“Get my saddle and bridle,” he said as he passed us.

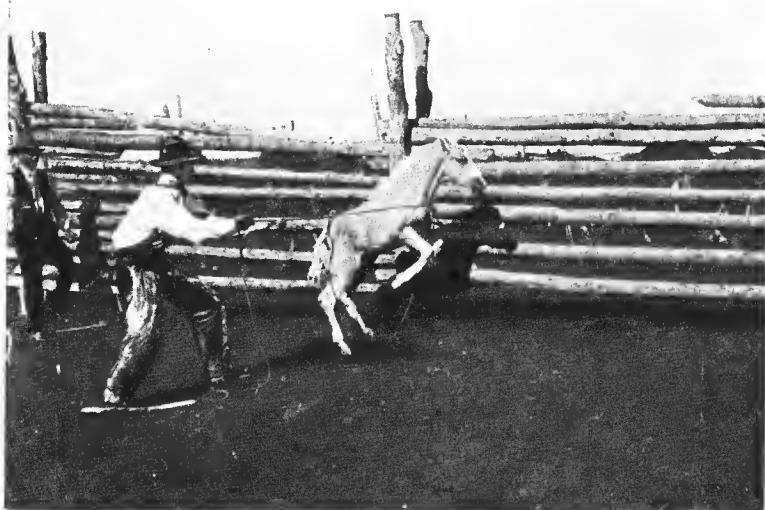
But the roan found it necessary to draw the line somewhere. The halter, though undesirable, had been bearable, but for an ungainly structure of leather to be strapped to one’s back, converting one’s grace of line into the humped ugliness of a dromedary, was sheer insult. He reared and struck, snorted and kicked.

Very well. The detestable little man seemed equally content. He snubbed the rope to a corral post, felt his way along it, and after rubbing the bridle over the animal’s face, slipped the bit between its teeth. Then he unbuckled the rawhide lariat from his saddle. A turn of the wrist and the horse’s fore feet were in the noose. A quick jerk and they were drawn together so that he stood, swaying perilously. In a twinkling the rawhide was snubbed to the fence, the saddle cinched into position, and the roan stood tasting for the first time the vile discomfort of a tightly buckled girth.

He shook his mane defiantly, beat the air with his trussed fore legs, and finally resorted to the buck—ducking his head, hunching his back, and leaping into the air. Twice this was repeated, and then,



"HALTER-BREAKING" ON HORSEBACK WITH THE LARIAT



ROPING A FOAL FOR BRANDING

oh ignominy ! The detestable little man's puny weight was thrown on the rawhide rope and the roan landed sprawling in the dust.

By the time he had scrambled to his feet, the halter rope was slipped from about his neck and the man was in the saddle.

For a full minute the horse stood sulkily digesting this surprising condition of affairs. The weight of him was a mere nothing, neither did his furry legs press unduly ; what more simple than to throw him from the leather hump and trample him in the dust ? But at the first buck something pricked the horse's ribs ; at the second the process was repeated, and at the third a black felt hat descended and "dusted" him from ear to tail.

Round and round the corral they sped, the horse bucking, twisting, and squealing with rage ; the man shaken and jolted like a rag doll, yet whooping triumphantly.

When the horse had bucked himself out, and settled into a steady, obedient trot, the man drew rein, slid off over his flank and came towards us with the rolling, bandy-legged gait of the born rider.

" Got any *bad* horses ? " he inquired.

V

THE PRAIRIE AS IT IS

WITH fifty head of good horses at our backs, we had nothing to fear for the haying season beyond the weather, and the season opened under perfect conditions.

We hired two men at forty dollars (£8) a month and their keep, and hauled two mowers, a ten-foot hay rake, and three wagons with a basket hay-rack on each made of thin willows, on to the plateau south of our location. The hay was in perfect condition, about a foot high, a dry, dark green in colour, and stretched away over level country for miles. There is nothing much more exhilarating than sitting on an easily-running mower, driving a willing team as you watch the grass falling in silky green waves behind the humming knife-blades ; especially when one can drive uninterruptedly ahead, slowly but surely laying low a square mile of hay that cost you nothing to raise, but which when cut and stacked is worth three to five dollars a ton.

A rancher's method of stacking may be considered rather slap-dash judged by English standards, but it must be remembered that on the



THE HAY "SWEEP" AT WORK



RUNNING THE HAY UP THE "SKIDWAYS" ON TO THE STACK

prairie the hay "cures" on the stem, thus saving the lengthy process of "making" which is necessary in this country. To all intents and purposes the hay is ready to stack the instant it has been cut and collected into bunches by the rake, and from this same instant it is the rancher's one aim to get it stacked and protected from rain at the earliest possible moment. All know this, and during the two months that haying usually lasts, work is carried on at high pressure, sometimes from five o'clock in the morning till eight and nine o'clock at night. The veriest tenderfoot can earn his forty or fifty dollars a month and "keep" during haying time on the plains.

The process is simple and, as I have said, exceedingly rapid. First come the mowers, two or perhaps three in number, each cutting a six-foot "swarth" of hay, and close behind them the rake which gathers it into "winrows." Next follows the "sweep," a heavy log fifteen feet long, pierced at intervals with upright stakes, and dragged over the ground by a team of horses at either end. This clumsy-looking implement, peculiar to the prairie, is one of those "simple" inventions that revolutionise old processes. Before its inception the toilsome business of "forking" hay on to a stack was as common on the prairie as elsewhere, but now hay forks and manual labour are almost totally done away with. The log is dragged cross-wise down the winrow of hay, bunching it as it

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goes, until no more can be drawn, then the horses are turned and drag the "sweep" away, leaving a foundation for a stack. The next load is thrown on top of the last by a pine pole skidway, and so on until the stack is complete. The stacks are then left out on the prairie, protected by a seven or eight furrow "fire guard" until the autumn, when there is ample time to haul the hay into the ranch.

Our hay stacked and guarded as well as might be, we turned our attention to making all snug for the winter. We bought our cattle carefully—a hundred yearling steers, shipped by rail to the prairie from the dairy farms of the East, and a hundred head of cows and calves born and raised on the plains; stock wild enough to run at the sight of a cow-shed, rustle for themselves in the hardest weather, and raise calves as sturdy as themselves. We herded them about the ranch and waited for winter.

And it came. The hardest the prairie had encountered for twenty-five years!

The memory of that winter is with me still, and I think will be to the day of my death. There was something almost uncanny in its relentlessness. Perhaps it is this that has given me such a poor opinion of the prairie in winter as a fit habitation for the civilised white man; at any rate I am still convinced that such a climate and such surroundings are only fitted to the Esquimaux.



A "BASKET" HAY RACK, HOLDING ONE TON



DINNER AT THE "CAMP" WHILE HAYING

There are those who will say that this winter was exceptional, a "hard luck" winter as it is called on the plains; and to these I can only say that among the seven I have experienced on the prairie, four were very little better.

For two weeks on end, and at intervals of two weeks and less, the thermometer registered from twenty to forty, and on one occasion fifty degrees below zero, and the wind blowing with it seemed to freeze one's very marrow. It is these winds which make the cold so intense. I have been told by men just returned from the Klondike and Alaska that the Canadian prairie strikes them as far colder, in spite of the thermometer being higher, simply on account of the wind.

For the benefit of those—and their name is Legion—who go to the Canadian North-West with the idea that cattle-ranching consists of riding over the plains in a red shirt and a Baden-Powell hat, with a revolver, a cartridge belt and lasso, let me briefly describe the work on a typical hard winter's day.

By sheer force of will, at six o'clock in the morning, you hurl yourself from a warm bed into an atmosphere that cuts like a knife and, with chattering teeth and numbed fingers, proceed to scramble into the few clothes you have dared to remove. You light the stove, break three inches of ice in the water-pail with a hammer, or the first thing to hand, and fill the kettle and saucepan.

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You go outside. It is still dark, but it is getting late, and the calves are bawling for their feed, so you mount a stack, and by the light of a stable lantern throw down hay into the cattle-yard for an hour. By this time the kettle is boiling and you adjourn for breakfast of porridge and salt bacon.

After the meal, dressed in three shirts, a Cardigan jacket, a fur coat, and three pairs of socks, you saddle up and ride round the cattle to see they are not drifting too far away. It comes on to snow, at first gently, but later develops into a blizzard that drives the cattle mercilessly before it, and you must follow. It is impossible to head them home in the teeth of it. Perhaps they come to a fence and huddle close together against it for warmth, and refuse to go to right or left. You must cut that wire, either by hammering each strand between two stones till flat and snapping it in two, or with a special cutter for the purpose, and let them through. You must keep the cattle moving, always moving, for if they lie down they die.

And so you drift on till the storm is over, perhaps in an hour, perhaps in a day, perhaps in two ; but you must never leave the cattle.

Suddenly you realise that one of your feet no longer feels cold. This means that it is frozen, and you must dismount and walk until the blood circulates once more. It seems that a needle has pricked your cheek, or chin, or nose. The pain is

almost unnoticeable, but it tells you that the icy wind has found its way through your fur collar, and, although you cannot see it, you know that a tiny, dead-white patch has come on your face, and will spread quickly unless you rub it violently with snow.

At last the storm is over and the long drive back begins. Reaching home you stable your horse and dash into the house, longing to warm your numbed feet at the stove; but your partner—if he is a partner—will make you put them into a bucket of ice-cold water instead—the surest poultice for frost.

This is one winter's day. Another is brilliant sunlight that converts the vast snow plains into a blinding white glare that forces the rider to wear smoked glasses if he would preserve his sight.

I have vivid recollections of my first experience of snow-blindness. I was riding over snow plains that glistened and glittered like a sea of diamonds in the midday sun, when I became aware of tiny red spots floating between my eyes and the horse's ears. They grew rapidly to the size of billiard balls, and finally burst into a blood-red mist that swirled and eddied before my eyes, blotting out the world as completely as a red window blind. My mount took me home—trust a horse for knowing his own stable!—but it was three days before I came out of a darkened room with blood-shot

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eyes, to blink at the sun like an owl strayed from his nook in the light of day.

One night, after a two days' continuous blizzard, there came a "chinook" or warm wind, that periodically sweeps the length of the Rocky Mountains, covering an area of one hundred and fifty miles as it goes, and thaws the snow into rushing torrents of water.

If a "chinook" lasts, it will rid the plains of snow in six hours and even less; but in this case it came for only an hour, and thawed only the surface of the snow, so that the frost at night converted it into a layer of ice.

The cattle could get no feed, for their sensitive noses were soon cut by the ice in their efforts to nuzzle down to the grass beneath, and we were forced to build a snow-plough, a heavy V-shaped structure of hewn logs, and with a team of horses drag it through the snow clearing a twelve-foot lane of grass, and followed by a lowing mob of starving cattle.

It is a terrible thing to see one's "bunch," practically representing one's worldly wealth on four legs, diminishing day by day, and to stand by powerless to stem the ebb. To come upon four-year-old steers so thin and poor that they are unable to stand. To see a cow's horns protruding from some snow bank and dig down to find your brand on her ribs, and in the process of digging to come upon another animal buried still deeper. To



A PRAIRIE TRAIL DURING A "HARD-LUCK" WINTER

stand at the tiny window of your log shack and mutter impotent and foolish curses at the frozen pane while it blizzards and still blizzards outside. To ride out and find twenty head of cattle marooned on the summit of a "butte," surrounded by six-feet snowdrifts through which it is necessary to dig a path with feverish haste to release them before they die. Yet all these and many more bitter experiences were ours that winter. That I survived the worry and strain at all, I attribute to the never-failing pluck and energy of my partner.

Even the antelope, hardy little denizens of the coldest climes, were forced to leave their winter feeding-grounds and strike south in search of grass. It was a pathetic sight, while riding with grain sacks wound about the legs of one's horse to prevent the crust of ice from tearing the skin, to see a herd of five hundred antelope filing over the interminable snow plains, heading always due south, the weak ones dropping out to die, the stronger fighting on till they came to the fence that runs along the Canadian Pacific Railway line. Here they would come to an enforced halt, or run up and down the line of fence, hunting for an opening. Perhaps they found one at the railway crossing of a prairie town and, surging through it, would trot on through the town, still going south, too tamed with hunger to notice those who stood about the streets watching them, for no one was allowed to molest them.

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Some ranchers lost all they had that winter, but by riding in all weathers, snow-ploughing, and using judgment in feeding our hay, my partner and I passed through it at last with only fifty per cent loss.

At the time we thought the calamity insurmountable. Since then I have learnt many things by travel; among others, that stock-raising in any country is a game of chance; that the Canadian prairie is neither better nor worse than her sister colonies—Australia with her droughts and South Africa with her rinderpest—and that life the world over is a see-saw, and one cannot always be at the upper end.



INTERIOR OF THE AUTHOR'S PRAIRIE "HOUSE"



"BUCKING SOME"

VI

A ROUND UP

WHEN at last the spring came, with the suddenness of the prairie, melting the snows and swelling the streams into turbulent rivers, it became evident that either my partner or I must attend the "round up" to gather any of our cattle that might have strayed.

A spun coin decided the matter, and a week later found me starting for the camp with a string of six saddle horses, and a waterproof bed.

The harsh voice of the night horse-herder broke in on my waking dreams the first morning, then came the musical tinkle of the bell horses out in the herd, the homely sizzle of cooking meat, and the palest of pale grey lights on the eastern side of the bed tent.

There had been a shower during the night, and the waft of air that entered the tent with the night herder's dripping head and shoulders smelled clean ; moreover, a tiny hole in the canvas roof had admitted a well-directed stream into my right riding boot, a fact only discovered when my foot squelched into a two-inch pool of water.

By the time I had struggled into my clothes, the

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other occupants of the tent had washed in the river, eaten their breakfast, and lighted pipes or rolled cigarettes, and I squatted in solitary state surrounded by a litter of dirty tin dishes, mugs, and knives, to struggle with steak and canned tomatoes while the cook and night herder watched me with furtive amusement.

The cow-puncher is a considerate animal. As long as the tenderfoot in his midst admits he is a tenderfoot and earnestly strives to do his best, he meets with nothing but the kindest of treatment ; but let him show the faintest inclination to " side " and woe betide him ! The cow-puncher's medicine for this disease has a bite of its own.

The tramp of horses' hoofs brought me from the " grub tent," my breakfast half eaten, just in time to rescue my saddle horses from the rope corral before they were turned loose with the rest under the care of the day herder. A kindly Frenchman, with yellow angora chaparejos and spurs ornamented with silver dollars effected the capture of my best mount with a well-directed throw of his lariat, and I saddled up with feverish haste.

The captain of the " round up " sat mounted, the centre of a group of riders, giving directions for the morning's " circles " in a short, crisp undertone, and presently the gathering broke up, scattering in twos and threes to all points of the compass.

Wondering vaguely if I should ever be in reason-



THE LOOK-OUT "ON CIRCLE"



THE AUTHOR AND HIS COMPANION RIDING "CIRCLE" ON A ROUND UP

able time for any one of the day's duties I headed off at a gallop after the last despatched "circle." An Englishman and an American they were, long wires of men, with faces burnt to dark mahogany and hands strong, yet white as a woman's by reason of the buckskin gloves that hardly ever left them uncovered. They rode in silence, at a steady lope or canter for a full two hours, and my horse was beginning to suck wind ominously before a few black specks appeared on the horizon, and with wordless accord the riders separated. I chose the Englishman, and together we made a detour of the cattle, driving in the stragglers and working them steadily towards a common centre, then drifting them towards camp.

On the way we fell in with other circle riders, and by noon a herd of some two thousand cattle were held on the flat while we rode into camp for dinner.

The meal took several minutes, and then to saddle with a fresh horse from the rope corral, and out to relieve the hungry riders who had been left to hold the herd.

I stayed behind; my teeth, which I had always fancied good, positively refusing to masticate in five minutes sufficient steak, beans, dried apples and tinned tomatoes to satisfy an eight hours' appetite.

When I made my slothful appearance out on the flat, "cutting" operations were in full swing.

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Riders were posted round the herd, while a few went among the cattle cutting out cows and calves for branding.

It is here that the cattle-horse shows his cleverness. He, as well as his rider, seems to get his eye fixed on the desired animal, following it tirelessly through the crowded herd and heading it with quick dashes and lightning turns towards the "cut bunch" perhaps fifty yards distant. It is by his dexterity in this department that he earns his title of "cut-horse," no doubt an envied one among his kind, for by its distinction he is pampered inordinately, kept for this purpose entirely, and never ridden on a wearying circle or still more arduous cattle-drive.

As a rule, the calves gathered on a "round up" are branded on the open prairie, but as we happened to be camped within a few miles of a ranch, it was decided to use a corral for the purpose and so save work for the horses, a factor which to the cow-puncher is always one of primary importance.

Yet no one knew of this arrangement until orders were given to "pike along to the bar triangle." Discipline and blind obedience are as much the essentials of a well-organised round up as of an army. The captain, in white shirt and tattered overalls, takes the place of the bedizened general. His plan of campaign remains a sealed book to the rank and file of riders. He wields indisputable power, and may at the first hint of



THE HERD DOWN ON THE "FLATS"



RIDING THE SAND-HILL COUNTRY

insubordination or "back talk," order the delinquent to "cut out his string," a humiliating order, wholesomely dreaded.

In the corral branding went on apace. Two riders move slowly through the main herd, with lariat circling methodically at their side, until their eye falls on the intended victim, then the pace is quickened, the calf breaks into a gallop, and in a flash his hind legs are within the noose, the slack end of the lariat is twisted about the horn of the Mexican saddle and he is dragged, bawling lustily, into the branding-corral.

After seeing an animal roped for the first time, nine people out of ten will be ready to swear that the lariat encircles the hind legs while in the air; such, however, is not the case. The noose is thrown on the ground in such a way that the feet descend into it, when it is promptly jerked upward. The art of roping is a life-long study, and one of extraordinary fascination.

On the appearance of the calf in the branding-corral, the "wrestlers" fall upon it tooth and nail. A sturdy prairie calf is no mean adversary hand to hand, and the wrestlers—usually two to an animal—often have their work cut out to bring him to earth, remove the roper's lariat from the legs, and hold him fast while the irons are applied.

Sometimes the cow will follow her offspring into the enemy's camp, encouraging it with sympathetic lows, and when the operation is completed, will

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lick the brand to alleviate the pain, so that perhaps an hour later the calf will be feeding quietly or playing with its fellows, apparently forgetful of its tribulations.

By seven o'clock the work was finished, and we returned to camp and supper after fifteen hours of the hardest, healthiest work in the world.

VII

ALONE

THE last day of the round up produced only five head of cattle, and when I had driven them home, my partner and I, seated on soap boxes each side of our home-made table, held a solemn conclave to discuss ways and means.

We soon came to the decision that with fifty per cent loss of cattle there would not be sufficient work, for at least the next year or two, to warrant our both staying on at the ranch, and in the end it was decided that I should strike out and fend for myself until better times.

By this arrangement, it may seem that my partner had the easier task, but such was not the case. There is nothing much more disheartening than to have to stay at home and try to retrieve a lost cause ; and to tell the truth, I was uncommonly glad to get the chance of a change under any conditions, after the dreariness of the hardest prairie winter for twenty-five years.

I had heard a great deal about the high wages paid to sheep-herders, and made a bee-line for the sheep-raising areas north of the Canadian Pacific Railway track. Forty dollars a month and "all

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found" was not to be sneezed at; at least I thought so when offered it by a rancher of the district.

Had I known then what I discovered a few months later, five hundred dollars a month would not have tempted me.

My "house" was twelve feet square, built of rough boards, evidently with a view to ventilation. My furniture consisted of a table and two boxes for chairs. My bed was a veritable work of art, consisting of three twelve-inch boards and two packing-cases. Then I had a stove that might have been used in the ark, and various culinary articles.

When I needed meat I killed a sheep; sour dough was my favourite bread, for the simple reason that I hadn't the vaguest idea how to make any other; and "black strap" treacle formed my "sweets."

As I look back on it all now I can clearly see the grades by which I descended from a sane, healthy human being to something nearer a lunatic than I ever wish to be again.

For the first week of my solitary existence the mere novelty of the thing made it bearable. "Absolute peace" I called it. The baaing of the sheep and the occasional howl of a coyote, I told myself, were vastly preferable to the bustle and tear of haying; one had time to think out here.



HORSE-HERDERS ENJOYING A SLY GAME OF "TWO UP"



CALVES ROPE AND DRAGGED INTO THE BRANDING CORRAL

The second week was precisely like the first except that when meal times came round I asked myself what was the use of lighting the fire, and answered the question by sitting down to sour dough, treacle, and water. It saved trouble, and would keep me alive equally well without the mutton and tea.

The third week was marked by my ceasing to clean my teeth—a relic of civilised habit I had adhered to through thick and thin up to the present, despite the amusement it had often created among cow-punchers.

Just about this time I also forgot to brush my hair, and even on occasions to wash. “What is the use ?” I argued with myself. “There’s not a soul to see me ; none to care whether I look like a scarecrow or a dandy.” Self-respect, I fancy, depends more on what others will think of us and our appearance, than on what we think ourselves.

At the end of a month I received the first intimation that I was acquiring new habits, for one evening I suddenly realised that I was talking to myself in quite a loud voice.

“I must stop this or it will grow on me,” I reflected, and then I realised that I had said this also aloud ; the habit had evidently taken deeper root than I knew. I laughed—the first laugh I had heard for a month—and it sounded strange to my own ears. Surely that was not the expression

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of merriment I indulged in among my fellow-men, I thought ; it sounded hollow and unnatural.

Twice after that I caught myself laughing with no apparent cause, and each time the sound gave me a shock, the exact nature of which is hard to define, except that it left me uneasy and alert for some hours afterwards.

At this period I had not taken the trouble to look in the mirror for over six weeks, until one morning I caught sight of a face in the little cracked looking-glass that hung at the side of the door.

I say "a" face advisedly, for at first glance I did not recognise it as my own. Of course, the bristly black beard on the chin had a great deal to do with the transformation, but, apart from that, the whole aspect of it appeared unfamiliar to me.

I seized the looking-glass in both hands and scrutinised my reflection minutely. I cannot give any reason for what I did next. As far as I remember, my feelings were a mixture of anger and fright ; anger that I should have allowed myself to come to such a state, and a nameless terror that I should become worse. At any rate I flung the glass from me, and as it fell shattered on the floor I received a third shock at the senseless act I had just committed. Should I do such a childish thing under ordinary conditions ? No, a thousand times no ! Whatever my faults, and they were many,

I had never been one to give way to peevish anger, much less to break things because my reflection displeased me.

Until close on midnight that evening, after corralling the sheep, I sat with my feet on the stove thinking, with tightly-closed lips, determined not to speak aloud.

Something had to be done or I should go mad; at last I had convinced myself of that. And then a thought came into my mind that set me shuddering. Was it too late? Was I a lunatic already? Nobody has ever given an accurate account of what it feels like to be a lunatic, or if they have I had never read it.

And then I laughed aloud. "How," I argued, "could I be reasoning out the matter in this sober fashion if I were insane? And yet, perhaps, it was my particular form of insanity to imagine myself insane." And so one foolish idea led to another, torturing my overwrought brain until my mind became numb, and I caught myself laughing again.

I think the realisation of that senseless laugh broke the spell, for with an oath I sprang to my feet, flung open the door, and fled into the night.

The exercise seemed to help me, for, after running until I was breathless, I stopped and saw what a fool I had been. Yet I also instinctively felt that I could bear the awful loneliness no longer.

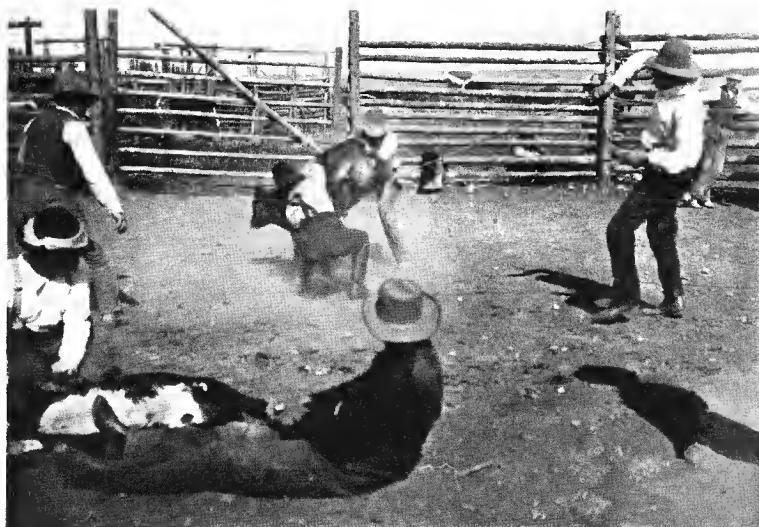
There is no need to relate the events that

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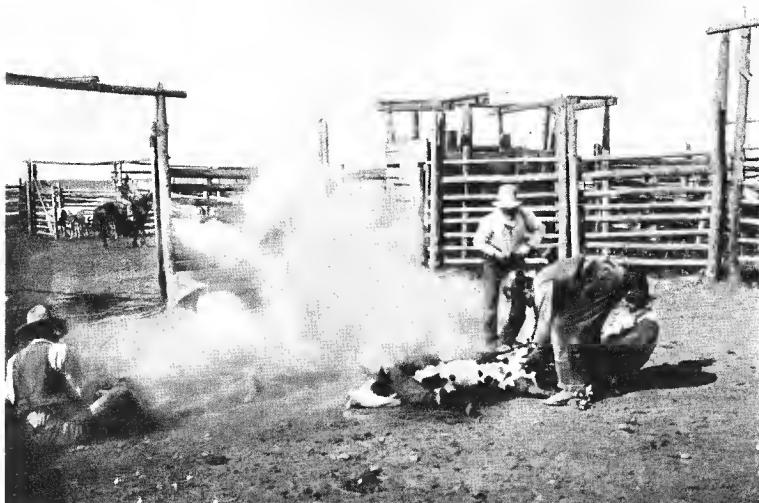
followed my arrival at the home ranch—the blustering anger of my “boss” at my foolishness in “quittin’ the job for no reason at all,” as he chose to designate my retirement, his point-blank refusal to drive me back to town, and my fifty-mile tramp over the prairie.

“Why do men undertake such soul-killing work?” you may ask. I can only reply that there is no occupation on the face of the earth, accompanied by sufficient remuneration, that will not be undertaken by someone; and sheep-herding is well paid for the amount of actual physical work required, but—

I will conclude this little incident with just one piece of advice, which I sincerely hope every man who has an atom of imagination or the faintest trace of a nervous system will take: Don’t go sheep-herding alone, even for forty dollars a month and “all found.”



CALF "WRESTLERS" AT WORK



EAR-MARKING, BRANDING, AND "CUTTING" AT ONE OPERATION

VIII

MY RUN HOME

By this time I was so heartily tired of the prairie that when, on my arrival at Maple Creek, a beef-buyer made me the offer of a passage to England with his cattle, I jumped at it.

“ Why not ? ” he urged, with the bland smile peculiar to beef-buyers. “ You get a free passage there, a month’s stop over on the other side, and a free passage back as far as Montreal.”

And I asked myself : “ Why not ? ” What was the Strand looking like just at present, and had anything yet been done with Kingsway ?

I have noticed that in the colonies it takes a man precisely half the time to decide on and pack for a journey of a thousand miles or more, than it does in England to prepare for a week-end trip to Brighton. At any rate, I felt I had earned a holiday, and in half an hour I was ready to take one.

The stockyards at the station were already crowded with beef that the buyer had purchased throughout the country, and all that afternoon we were busily engaged prodding, yelling, and pushing the half-frantic beasts up the narrow

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chutes that led from the stockyards to the huge box-cars waiting to hold twenty in each.

By twelve o'clock that night the work was completed and, with a rousing cheer, the cattlemen climbed into the "caboose," or van, at the back of the train, and the long line of cars with their trampling, lowing freight, moved out of the prairie station.

The distance from the point of entrainment to the coast was fifteen hundred miles ; the entire trip, what with side-tracking for passenger trains, and the usual delays of a railway, lasting about seven days ; and as far as I can remember, beyond taking an hour for each meal, and five or six for sleep, the company in that "caboose" never ceased playing poker the entire journey. My own fortunes at the game after the first two days, are better left unrecorded. The average cowboy is a past master in the gentle art of bluff, and any tenderfoot who values his dignity, and the money in his pockets, had best keep out of the charmed circle.

The cattle are fed at only three points between the stock country and the coast, and the effect of the prolonged thirst and hunger makes a vast difference in their appearance when they reach Montreal ; in fact, one hundred pounds shrinkage is nearly always allowed on beef making the trip. At Montreal it was found that the sudden setting in of winter had iced up the St. Lawrence, and it

would be necessary to take the cattle across the State of Maine in bond, and ship them from Portland. However, it was at Montreal that the remaining cattlemen, engaged for the ship at Portland, boarded the train, and gave us the opportunity of seeing the kind of men we should have to mix with for two weeks of an ocean voyage.

Never had I seen such a heterogeneous collection of down-at-heel humanity. For one wishing to study the ways of the lowest dregs of this earth, I would advise him to give the slums of London a rest, and watch the throngs who besiege the offices of the agents who undertake to supply the cattle-boats with "help" at Montreal. German and Russian Jews, Dukhabores, Italians, negroes; broken-down "sharks" and confidence men from the large cities of the United States; one-time moneyed youths from the larger English towns, who, in a single month (or less) in New York, Montreal, or Toronto, have run through the capital given them to start in business, and are returning on the off-chance of getting more. All bustling and hustling each other after the same prize—a free passage to London, the home, and often the grave, of the desperate.

The caboose was crammed with them, reeking of whisky. The cowboys, wild enough in their own particular way, but at least wholesome animals of the open air, gave them a wide berth, and quietly continued their everlasting poker.

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The journey from Montreal to Portland was, to me, at any rate, a nightmare. Fights were of hourly occurrence, and no one thought of sleeping that night ; so that it was with feelings of unutterable relief that I saw from the look-out in the roof of the caboose the pine forests of Maine give way to the smoke of Portland, with the angry grey of the Atlantic beyond.

The cattle, weak and gaunt from the long journey, but still wild enough, were driven from the cars into a vast network of whitewashed stockyards. Here, for the first time in their lives since being branded as calves, the indignity was forced upon them of being tied with a rope. For this ticklish work cowboys are always selected. The cattle are run from the main pen into a chute that narrows down to a width only sufficient for the animals to pass through, and at one point runs past a platform a few feet high. The men stand on this platform, and as the terrified cattle push frantically past, it is their work to throw a small noose over the animal's horns and in a twinkling tie a knot that will prevent it from slipping any tighter.

Seven of us were engaged in this strenuous business, momentarily risking a jab in the chest or face from the writhing horns beneath us, when the stockyard foreman, a loud-voiced domineering individual who seemed to think that shouting and cursing were all that was expected of him, in-

advertently dropped the remark that we were "a slow crowd."

The effect was instantaneous. If there is one thing an experienced cowboy will not stand, it is dictation from an outsider. We stopped work as one man.

"Perhaps," drawled a sun-bronzed giant with the perspiration streaming from his face, "perhaps, boss, you'll show us just how like the job oughter be done?"

The yard foreman flushed angrily; he probably saw that he had put his foot in it, but evidently intended to carry the matter through with a high hand.

"Why, sure," he snapped, and jumped on to the platform. We stood in an admiring circle, murmuring, "Marvellous!" "How does he do it?" etc., while the foreman prepared a tie rope.

"You want to get well over your work," he explained, and illustrated his meaning by putting one leg over the barricade and tackling a gigantic wild-eyed Texan with horns four feet from tip to tip. There was a brief struggle, a sound of ripping cloth, and Mr. Foreman was back on the platform in about half a second or less, with a clean rip in his overalls from ankle to well above the knee.

"I see!" we all murmured gravely.

"How would this go?" suggested the giant before mentioned, as he dropped cleanly on to the back of the steer, and rode him out into the yard,

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tying the rope as he went. This sounds almost incredible, but I have seen it done, not only in those stockyards, but out on the open range as a bit of entertainment for a round-up party. The foreman was strangely silent for the rest of the day.

Fifteen hundred cattle had to be dealt with in these chutes, and by night the task was completed. The driving of the cattle into their pens on the boat was nothing less than a wild medley of charging beasts, fleeing men, shouts, curses, and the dull sound of blows delivered with every description of weapon by every description of humanity. No attempt at tying the animals is ever made for at least three days after the departure of the boat, for the simple reason that it is impossible. In fact, on this particular trip, some of the cattlemen had not succeeded in capturing their tie-ropes, much less tying them to the pen poles, until two days from Liverpool, when, of course, it was unnecessary. Fifteen head, or thereabouts, were driven into each pen, the bars put up, and the cattle allowed to trample and hook each other into an acceptance of, if not contentment in, their surroundings.

It is said that in the report of a wrecked cattle-ship, the loss of life was recorded thus : "The ship sank with a hundred poor souls and fifty cattlemen!" I mention this to give some idea of the feeling with which the cattleman is regarded. He is



CATTLE BEING "DIPPED" FOR MANGE



TALLYING CATTLE AS THEY ENTER THE DRYING PEN

no longer a man, but a nonentity, beneath notice except when the foreman finds it necessary to relieve his feelings. "Once aboard the ship and the cattleman is mine!" is the foreman's motto, and he lives up to it. It is impossible for the cattleman to run away, and the foreman knows it. It is useless for him to fight, because if he did he would be promptly put in chains, and the foreman knows this also; therefore the cattleman is obliged to remain—a cattleman.

At one o'clock in the morning the boat sailed, and we were shown to our state-rooms, or rather, we found our way down into a dirty, evil-smelling hole about forty feet by fifteen, honeycombed with iron bunks, arranged in tiers one above the other and reaching to the deck above. A narrow table ran the length of the cabin between the bunks, and on this were doled out to each man a tin plate, a mug, teaspoon, and knife and fork, in readiness for the evening meal.

About forty men were housed in this cabin, and the scramble for seats amounted to a free fight. Enough order, however, was restored to allow of the drawing of lots for the doubtful privilege of fetching the "grub" from the galley, and when it arrived—! feeding-time at the Zoological Gardens is a daintily conducted repast compared with supper in that cabin! The "grub" consisted of barley soup, with little squares of meat floating in it at rare intervals, and was contained

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in a huge tin dish resembling a foot-bath. With our mugs firmly grasped in our hands, we fought our way to the soup tureen and angled frantically for the elusive dice of meat. I succeeded in netting two in half a mug of barley water, and with this, a piece of bread and some margarine, I retired to my bunk covered with honours—and soup.

In the middle of the meal it was discovered that some had more "butter" than others—gross injustice in a civilised community! A bulky Swede took matters in hand, and appointed himself "server," no one apparently wishing to disclaim his title.

At three-thirty in the morning we were called from our bunks (my blankets had been stolen while I was asleep) and breakfast was "served." The margarine was gravely divided into forty equal sections, each amounting to a cube the size of an ordinary die. Consternation reigned supreme! It was discovered that this absurd quantity was each man's fair allowance. The Swede was indignant, the Russian and German Jews were indignant; we were all indignant! Yes, we would go to the captain; he should see these starvation rations. No Jack-in-office would do—to the captain!

The affair was growing quite dramatic. Forty righteously indignant but rather dirty cattlemen filed from the cabin, and ascended the bridge companion, the leader bearing on a tin plate the fatal

wad of margarine. By the time the procession had reached the bridge, like the twelve little nigger boys, it had miraculously dwindled to twenty in number ; a little further and only fifteen remained, until when the captain appeared, with a smile and a frown struggling for mastery on his weather-tanned face, four apologetic and apprehensive cattlemen stuttered out their woes. The captain very good-naturedly led them to the Board of Trade regulations hanging on the wall in a glass frame, pointed out the quantity of margarine allowed each man thereby, and bowed them down the companion again. The committee's report to the backsliders waiting in the bunk-room, was short and to the point : "We've got all that's a-comin' to us, and why did you shunks drop out and——" But nothing further regarding the incident need be recorded.

From four o'clock in the morning till noon we were kept busy feeding the cattle, thirty of which were apportioned to each man. The hay was steam-winched up from the hold forward and carried by hand to the after-hatch, down which it was thrown into the alley-ways that run between the cattle. To carry a square bale of hay weighing from 120 lb. to 150 lb. on one's shoulder on the slippery deck of a rolling boat is not quite so easy as it sounds ; at any rate, one broken leg and some minor injuries were the result on this particular trip.

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However, the feeding was play compared with the watering. A large hogshead, kept full of luke-warm condensed water by means of pipes leading from the engine-room, stood at the end of each alley-way, and the gangs of men were given pails. One stood at the water-butt and filled the pails to pass them on to the next, and so on down the line, the two end men giving them to the cattle.

The poor beasts, half mad with thirst, created by the residuum of salt in the water, struggled three and four at a time to get their noses into the pail, and could only be kept at a distance by a continual jabbing on the nose from spiked boots. It was pitiable to see a line of cattle after watering-time, with blood streaming from their noses ; but this is only another of the cruelties that are necessary in connection with cattle.

The first really serious fight took place on the third day out, and was the result of the same old trouble—food. Two Russian Jews came in late for a meal, and vied with one another in the fishing contest for squares of meat. One succeeded in bagging all there were, and the other, infuriated at his loss, dashed the mug from his hand. Whereupon the first rushed to his bunk, where he kept the hand-axe allowed each man for cutting the wire on the baled hay, and made a wild cut at his countryman's head, leaving nothing but the lobe of the ear on one side of it.

Two days later a storm arose, and this gave

occasion to another little fracas. The hatches were battened down, making the atmosphere between decks little short of stifling. The cattle swayed and staggered from side to side in huddled heaps, looking utterly miserable, and the deck above was continually washed with seas that were afterwards found to have carried away about two hundred of the eleven hundred sheep penned upon them. The sheep foreman was half frantic at the thought of his charges going without food, and ordered one of his men to get to work. The man was washing at a swivel basin at the time and refused to obey, on the ground that he had no desire to be washed overboard with the sheep. The foreman picked up a pail of water and dashed it over him, and the man retaliated by wrenching the basin from its swivel and bringing it down on the foreman's head. They retired to one of the hatches to settle the matter "like gentlemen," and one of the most ferocious yet ludicrous battles I have ever seen fought, took place. The ship's rolling made it impossible to stand, much less spar with any exactitude. The men's fists were launched in good faith, but often landed a foot or more each side of their mark. By the merest accident, the foreman happened to have his fist in the way when his adversary tripped over the canvas that covered the hatch, and inadvertently brought his jaw in contact with it. There was no doctor on board, and that man got off the boat at

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Liverpool a week later with his jaw at the most extraordinary angle.

Never have I been so glad to see the muddy waters of the Mersey. My knees positively trembled under me with weakness through overwork and paucity of food. I went to the best hotel in Liverpool, torn overalls, filthy shirt and all, and it was not until I had soaked in a hot bath for a solid hour, and donned the only respectable suit I had brought with me, that I felt in a fit state to mix with my fellow-men.

The next morning I took a cab to the Seamen's Home to collect my wages. Incidentally, the cab cost me five shillings, and my wages for two weeks of the hardest work I ever undertook, amounted to five shillings !

Who wouldn't be a cattleman ?

IX

THE RETURN

THE month in England fled like a week, and at the end of it, apart from the time limit set by my return ticket, I found my resources so low that there was nothing else for it but to leave.

On account of owning "a ranch in Canada," I found it impossible to convince home people that I was not possessed of boundless wealth, and I steadfastly refused to write to my partner for money. My understanding with him was "to fend for myself," and this I was determined to do at all costs.

As it happened, on landing at Montreal, I had just enough to take me to Winnipeg and not a yard further; and Winnipeg is not the best place in the world in which to be stranded. What with Salvation Army, Dr. Barnardo, and other immigrants, wages for such work as the average uninspired products of English public schools can undertake are about the lowest in the Dominion. How often have I wished that I had some trade at my fingers' ends!

How to get West; that was the problem that confronted me as I strolled into the town with my

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belongings in a grain sack slung on my back ; and on crossing the railway track at the station to get to a particularly low-down boarding-house on the opposite side, the answer came with all the unexpectedness one comes to accept and almost look for in new countries.

A freight train stood on the metals, awaiting an engine to carry it westward, and, lying the entire length, and resting on the edge at one end of a truck, were three long iron pipes about two feet in diameter. There was nothing very extraordinary in this, but, as I was about to move on, a head appeared out of the end of one of these pipes, and a voice with an unmistakable Western accent inquired genially : “ Got a chew, stranger ? ”

Trying not to look surprised (it never does to show surprise at anything in the West), I remarked that I could oblige him, whereupon six feet of ragged “ hobo ”—i.e. a tramp—squeezed itself out of the opening, jumped down on to the track beside me, and relieved me of half a good plug of “ Bob’s ” chewing tobacco. Although I had never succeeded in educating myself to tobacco-chewing, I usually carried a plug or two for just such purposes as the one that now presented itself. My curiosity was aroused.

“ What on earth are you doing in there ? ” I asked.

“ Going West,” he answered in a tone that seemed to express surprise at the question.

“ Why in a pipe ? ” I asked.

“ Have you never beat your way anywheres ? ” he replied, looking at me with evident contempt. “ By the looks of you I should a-thought you’d done plenty of it yerself. What’s the use of payng four cents a mile in a passenger when you can travel just as comfortable for nothin’ ? Look at this now,” he went on, pointing with pride to the three pipes ; “ I’m in the first pipe, my clothes in the second, and my grub in the third. I’ve never paid a train fare yet.”

An idea struck me. “ You say this car is going West ? ” I asked.

“ Look at the label for yourself.”

I examined the little green card in the iron frame attached to every freight car. Sure enough it was labelled Moosejaw. Here was a chance.

“ Do you think there’s room for me on this outfit ? ” I inquired, intending the question as a gentle hint for my new acquaintance to let me occupy one of his pipes. But the Western mind is dense on occasion.

“ Waal, I’ll tell you,” he said, leaning towards me and whispering confidentially in my ear. “ This train’s ‘bout the best I ever struck for beatin’, and it’s fair full o’ men, though you can’t see ‘em. See that box-car full of coal ? Waal, it isn’t full. Just up at the top there’s a hole that’s been made by throwin’ some o’ the coal out on the line, and there’s a man up there ; saw him get in

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myself. See that car of lumber ? There's a man in the middle of that, 'cos he came over and asked me for a chew. And there's one goin' to work his way up helpin' the stoker, but I've had some of that, and he can keep the job. But to my mind the best place in the whole outfit has been left out, and I had a mind to give up these quarters for it, and that's the refrigerator."

It sounded chilly, I thought.

" It's empty," he added, seeming to read my thoughts. " I'll take you down and show you."

He led the way slowly down the track.

" It doesn't do to hurry, or they see you're trying to ' cache ' yourself," he explained. " There you are," he added, pointing to the huge box-car, which had apparently no opening save the big sliding door in the centre, always kept locked. " You climb in through a trap in the roof."

After a hasty glance round, he climbed up the little iron ladder that is to be found at the back of every car for the convenience of the brakeman, and I joined him. The padlock of the trap was broken, which saved us a good deal of trouble, and it opened easily enough. Now, however, came another task, rather more difficult. Underneath this outer trap of boards was a heavy zinc-covered lid about four inches thick, fitting closely into the opening, which was also lined with zinc. This, of course, was intended to keep the cold air in when the chamber was full of ice, and the van below

filled with meat. However, after a good pull this gave way with a rushing sound not unlike the drawing of a cork.

"Now, then, in you get!" commanded my companion; "the engine may come along any time now." There was no use in hesitating, so I let myself boldly down into the hole, which proved to be about three and a half feet deep.

"Are you set?" came the voice from above.

"Yes," I answered, and the zinc lid shot down into its place with a dull "sog" that sent a shiver through me.

It was quite dark, and I was crawling slowly along the side of the car when I stumbled into something soft and alive. For a moment it gave me quite a turn, but I was soon reassured.

"Who you pushin', stranger?" came a voice out of the darkness. It was a fellow-passenger, and I heaved a sigh of relief.

"What you doin' in here, anyway?" he inquired after an embarrassing pause.

"Much the same sort of thing as yourself," I replied.

"Got a chew?" The inevitable query.

I handed the remaining half-plug into the darkness, and it disappeared with alacrity, to return in a moment minus a fair-sized corner. My companion was evidently not a conversationalist, for we sat in silence for quite half an hour, and I began to wonder if the engine was ever coming, when

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suddenly a terrific jolt shook the car and landed me nearly into the lap of my fellow-passenger. The engine had arrived. I heard a whistle, unusually muffled, and a faint puffing that seemed to be very far off, and the next moment, with many jolts and jars, we had started on our strange journey.

“They’ll be stoppin’ again in an hour or two,” volunteered my companion, after another lengthy pause.

“How long?” I asked.

“Long enough to shunt off the cars they don’t want and for us to get a breath of fresh air, anyway.”

“And are you going to get out there?” I asked in surprise.

“Why not? It’ll be dark, and I’ve only got two sausages and a bit of bread to last me up to Regina. Besides, we must get some fresh air.”

“Do you mean this hole is air-tight?” I demanded, a creepy sensation stealing over me at the very thought.

“How do you suppose they keep the cold air in when it’s full of ice?” was the abrupt reply.

A sudden purely imaginary sensation of stuffiness came upon me, for, considering that we had not been in the box an hour, it could be nothing more.

“Let’s have a breather now,” I suggested.

“Can’t; the brakesman might see us. He’s

got a window in the van that looks all along the top of the cars."

"What's the fine if we're caught?" I inquired, thirsting for information as well as fresh air.

"Six months, unless you can square the brakeman. You can't expect to travel for nothin' without some sort of risk."

Visions of luxurious Pullmans or even more humble Colonist cars came before me, but I remembered that if it were not for my present mode of conveyance I should have been still stranded in Winnipeg, and my heart was refreshed. My reflections were cut short by another jolt that again precipitated me against my companion.

"Here we are, I guess," he exclaimed, and crawled past me. I heard hard breathing and the sound as of someone straining against a heavy weight.

"This blamed thing's got kind of stiff," gasped my fellow "beater"; but the next minute, with the same sickening "sog," the heavy zinc lid gave way to the burly "hobo's" back and flew open, pushing the outer trap with it, exposing a black, star-spangled sky.

When my fellow-passenger had climbed out and disappeared, I thrust my head through the opening and drew in deep breaths of the fresh, clear air. About half an hour elapsed, during which the train was shunted backwards and forwards in the usual apparently aimless fashion to which

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freight trains are addicted, throwing me hither and thither like a shuttlecock. At last, however, we appeared to be ready, and the engine gave forth a shrill whistle. I was beginning to fear that my friend would be too late, when a head appeared over the edge of the car.

The "hobo" was evidently in a hurry, for he ran up the ladder like a cat, and, crouching low, he made a dash for the trap, which I held in readiness.

"Brakesman coming down the line; don't think he saw me," he whispered hurriedly, and, snatching the trap from my hand, jumped down into the car, letting both trap and lid fall simultaneously into place with unusual violence.

We were soon lost in the solid enjoyment of munching bread and meat and washing it down with the contents of a bottle which my companion produced from somewhere, so we were thoroughly warm and comfortable. There was one more stop, and after that I fell asleep with my grain sack as a pillow.

I haven't the least idea how long I stayed in this blissful condition; I only know that the first thing I noticed on waking was that the atmosphere was decidedly stuffy.

"Are you there, pard?" I called into the darkness.

"Waal, I don't know where else I'd be considerin' that this blamed trap's stuck," came the answer.

At first I thought the man must be joking. I crawled to the end of the car, felt for the trap, and then, putting my back against it, pressed with all my strength. It might have been the solid roof for all the impression I could make. I thought a lot of things, but only said, "So it is!" and sat down to think, inwardly determined not to be the first to get excited.

My companion vouchsafed no remark.

"Shall we both push together?" I suggested, in what I intended to be a matter-of-fact tone.

"Can't; there isn't room for both our backs in that opening.

"Couldn't we cut our way out through the side?"

"Got a knife?"

"No."

"Neither have I."

"What on earth are we to do?" I burst out, in desperation.

"Wait till the next stop and give ourselves away, I guess," was the cheerful response.

"When is the next stop?"

"Look here, stranger; do you suppose freights go by schedule? How do I know what the next stop'll be, or when, for that matter?"

"And supposing at the next stop nobody happens to come along?"

This question was evidently not worth answering, for no reply came. As a matter of fact, I

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expect my taciturn friend was sick of answering the fusillade of idiotic questions.

My imagination, I suppose, must have increased the stuffiness of the atmosphere, for when I sat down once more to think things over I felt as though I could hardly breathe.

We must have sat in suspense for at least another half-hour, and how my companion could remain impassive and apparently resigned, with the knowledge that unless fresh oxygen were forthcoming within at the most two hours we should probably be struggling for the breath of life, surpassed my tenderfoot understanding.

I crawled up and down the narrow box, hitting my head first against the roof and then the sides of the car. I pummelled and yelled and made fierce attempts to push open that four inches of zinc that separated us from freedom, but all to no purpose.

At last I sank into my original place in the corner with the chill of despair at my heart, and beads of perspiration on my forehead.

Suddenly a shrill whistle announced that the train was approaching a station or siding. I think that must be the first time a train whistle was blessed.

Already I began to feel fresh air and freedom at hand, the two things that I have since come to the conclusion are their possessor's greatest blessings.

The first jolt had not shaken the car before we both set to shouting and kicking the sides of our prison.

Jolt ! Jolt ! Jolt ! Bang ! Bang ! Our voices, amidst the din of the shunting cars, sounded like the squeals of a caged mouse.

Even in the position I was then in I could not help feeling some exultation as I noticed that my companion was at last just as excited as myself.

Ultimately the train came to a standstill, and together we raised one frantic shout, accompanied with kicks on the side of the car, which I verily believe would have given way if we had kept kicking long enough.

There was no answer.

We waited in breathless suspense.

Then there came a faint, methodical crunch, crunch on the gravel at the side of the track.

Again we shouted.

The crunching came nearer and nearer and finally stopped.

We yelled and beat the car-side afresh.

“ Where are you, anyway ? ” came a gruff voice from outside.

“ In here, and nearly stifled,” I yelled. “ For Heaven’s sake let us out sharp ! ”

“ Where’s ‘ here ’ ? ”

“ In the refrigerator.”

A low chuckle, which at the time I remember thinking distinctly out of place, greeted this piece

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of information, and soon steps could be heard ascending the little iron ladder.

I heard the outer trap opened. That was one inch nearer fresh air, but there were still four inches of zinc between ourselves and freedom.

“ You can’t open that,” shouted my companion ; “ it’s stuck ! Open the other.”

There are always two traps on the top of a car, but, of course, the second in our case was locked. However, it soon opened to the brakesman’s key ; the outer lid came up, and after a few seconds’ tugging, the inner followed suit with the same curious sucking sound as before, as though it were loath to release its captives.

I was about to thrust my head out to get a mouthful of real air, when the “ hobo ” pushed me aside and whispered hurriedly : “ Let me work this.”

“ Kind of cold to-night,” he remarked, jovially, to the brakesman. As the perspiration was standing on my forehead in beads, I could hardly see the force of this remark.

“ Yes, but what——” began the brakesman.

“ Have a drink ? ” said the “ hobo,” and he held out the bottle we had shared on the previous day.

“ Thanks ; but why——” The rest of the sentence was stopped by the neck of the bottle, and the outflow of its contents.

He was ours ! He had, as it were, tasted of our salt.

As for me, I retired into the darkness once more, and, divesting myself of a boot and sock, extracted my last-remaining dollar bill. Then, climbing back to the roof again, I presented the money to the brakesman.

He looked at it for a moment, and then at me.

“What’s this for?” he asked.

“Er—er—for you,” I stammered.

“Thanks,” he said. “I’ve done some beatin’ myself in my time,” and passed it back.

Which goes to prove that Westerners are enigmas, and that there are brakesmen and brakesmen.

We travelled the rest of the way with that trap open!

X

I GO WEST

THIS was not by a long way the end of my "train-beating" experiences, for, on arrival once more at Maple Creek, I found myself in the rather curious position of being penniless not sixty miles from my own ranch. However, keeping steadily before me my agreement to "fend for myself," I determined to try my luck still further West and, under the circumstances, there was only one way to get there.

During my wanderings, I had heard of a good many methods of free conveyance, among others "beating" a passenger train. This, I had been assured, although a far more risky proceeding than that of tackling a "freight," had the compensating advantages of being far more rapid and direct—not to say ambitious. The "hobo" riding on the "rods" of an express "passenger" has a supreme contempt for his brother of the "box-car."

Taking nothing but absolute necessities, and those in my friend the grain sack, I crept from the hotel one night and, crouching in the grass beside the railway track, waited until a passenger train flashed by and pulled up at the station. Then I

ran, bending low, and clambered on to the rods or stanchions beneath the hindmost coach.

The position was hardly as secure as I had expected, but by laying my grain-sack "portmanteau" across the rods I managed to improvise a kind of seat, and although the floor of the carriage above was too low to allow of sitting up, and the sack too small to make it possible to lie down, I contrived to recline in a position half-way between the two, and as the train started a minute later, I had little opportunity of studying personal comfort. Safety was at once the instinctive consideration, and as the pace quickened, I gripped a rod in either hand and held on for life, with the carriage swaying above me, an icy current of air sweeping me from head to foot, and the gravel of the road-bed hurtling about my ears.

In the first quarter of an hour, with numbed hands and aching arms, I wished myself anywhere else than where I was. In the second, with a bruised, hatless head, and a face cut to bleeding by the whirlwind of stones, I thought the end could not be far off. In the third, a kindly stupor stole over me and, still mechanically gripping the icy-cold rods, I lay not caring greatly what befell.

The passenger train runs from Maple Creek to Medicine Hat, a town about sixty miles up the line, without stopping, unless it is flagged at two sidings that lie between. How it was that I found myself in the same position at the end of the two

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hours that it takes to cover the distance, I haven't the remotest idea. By all the laws of equilibrium and gravitation I should have been lying stunned in the grass or mangled between the lines ; yet, at last, I became aware that the deafening din of wind and gravel had ceased. I crawled from my hiding-place and staggered into Medicine Hat with a conviction simmering somewhere at the back of my befuddled brain that the art of "beating" a passenger train was not mine.

It was while in this town that I became a "bleacher." The process is simple, and may be accomplished on any fair-ground in Western Canada or the United States.

One pays fifty cents at a pay-box presided over by a weather-worn gentleman—usually a Scotsman—whose jaw tirelessly revolves on a quid of tobacco or chewing gum, and receives in exchange a yellow card announcing on one side that the bearer is entitled to one "bleacher" seat, and on the other that as it is more desirable to smoke here than hereafter, he may as well give Buck Eye cigars a fair trial.

The "bleacher" then sits on a wooden bench for two hours beneath a pitiless sun, surrounded by a Bedlam of shouting fellow-bleachers" and a blizzard of peanut shells, and the initiation ceremony is complete. To be sure one may pay a dollar and sit in a covered grand stand, but this, from my point of view, would have robbed the



WHAT THE "BLEACHERS" SAW



ROPING THE RUNAWAY SCAR HEAD

occasion of half its romance—I was going to see a bucking contest, and I was going to be a “bleacher.”

Presently, to the accompaniment of maniacal yells, the bronchos or “bad” horses were driven into a corral at the side of the ground by riders, and the master of ceremonies, a corpulent gentleman with a bronzed, good-natured face, walked in front of the grand stand and removed his hat. Clearly, we “bleachers” were to be ignored.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “it gives me great pleasure to see you all here this afternoon——”

“You don’t say!” from an ironical someone.

“Especially as this is likely to be the last riding contest held at Medicine Hat, or indeed anywhere in the Dominion of Canada.”

(Loud and insistent cries of “Why?”)

“Because, as we all know—as all the world knows—Canada is the greatest farming country in the world, and Medicine Hat is going to be the greatest farming——”

“Aw, cut it out!” “Dry up!” and “Go to bed!” from every stockman, cowboy, and anti-farmer present.

The corpulent gentleman smiled, as one who has touched the necessary note of public feeling, and drew a crumpled sheaf of papers from his pocket.

“The first rider,” he continued, “will be Shorty Simpson——”

(Yells of “Stay with him, Shorty!” “I’m with you, Shorty!” “Fix him, Shorty!”)

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The master of ceremonies uplifted a restraining hand.

“And he will ride Scar Head, a vurry bad horse.”

There was sudden silence as a squat, powerfully-built man walked before the grand stand leading an ugly-looking red roan. She suffered herself to be blindfolded (the quickest method of handling an unbroken horse) without protest. Even the plain rope halter that in a riding contest does service for bit and bridle she passed without comment, but the saddle seemed to sound a warning; her back arched ominously, then sagged, slowly down and still down, till it seemed that her spine must surely snap or her legs collapse.

The little man seized on this as the psychological moment, and swung himself nimbly into the saddle. Another snatched the blind from the animal’s eyes, and her back went up like the released string of a bow—and the rider with it. They descended in a cloud of dust, the horse with legs stiff and unresisting, the man with a jolt that flung his body limply over the horn of the Mexican saddle. At the second leap the man shot cleanly over the horse’s left shoulder, and landed on all fours in the dust.

He scrambled to his feet amidst a pandemonium of derisive yells and sought ignominious shelter in the crowd.

“Never had my right stirrup,” I heard him explaining to a sympathetic “bleacher.”

Public sentiment—which seems as fickle at bucking contests as it is elsewhere—was now decidedly in favour of the horse, and the runaway Scar Head, with flapping stirrups and trailing halter-line, chased by a rider with whirling lariat, received an ovation as she sped past the grand stand. But soon a well-directed noose had encircled her neck, and she was led forward to bow her acknowledgments.

“The next rider,” announced the master of ceremonies, when comparative quiet had been restored, “is Slim Smith, and he will ride——”

“Scar Head! Scar Head!” roared the “bleachers” to a man.

The master of ceremonies looked towards us and smilingly bowed—at last we had been recognised!

“He was drawn to ride Rattle Snake,” he continued, “but if——”

“Scar Head! Scar Head!” we reiterated fiercely, and there was something of the ancient Romans’ “thumbs down” in the demand.

Slim Smith seemed equally pleased, and after the usual preliminaries swung an elongated leg over the saddle.

At a bucking contest, the rider is not expected to in any way direct the movements of his mount; indeed, he is incapable of doing so by reason of the bitless rope bridle. His sole business is to show that whatever free and unhampered efforts his horse

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can employ to unseat him, he and the saddle remain one. And so riders are posted about the ground to "head off" from dangerous points.

They had their work cut out with Scar Head. The blind had no sooner been torn from her eyes than she headed straight for the benches, bucking and snorting with indignation. The "bleachers" scattered like startled rabbits, and took shelter behind the grand stand. Then she turned her attention to a harmless gentleman in glasses and suspiciously English tweeds, on a raised platform of his own, who was breathlessly turning the handle of a bioscope camera. He showed his pluck by continuing operations until the last moment, when he and camera miraculously vanished, and the platform overturned with a crash.

A group of Indians, in purple and fine linen, waiting for the powwow or dance, that the programme told us should be held during the interval, fled precipitately, their shrieking squaws scrambling up the ground fence to drop into safety on the other side.

The least perturbed individual on the ground was certainly Slim Smith, his body jerked this way and that, his long, leather-clad legs gripping the saddle like a vice, and his arm tirelessly belabouring the horse's heaving sides with a short leather whip or quirt.

Scar Head had found her master, and at last was bound to admit it, coming to a sullen stand-

still as her rider slipped to the ground and stood with uplifted hat while the grand stand and "bleacher" benches rocked with applause.

The Indian powwow was a trifle pathetic, and only served to illustrate the decadence of that fine species the North American Indian.

The penalty for supplying an Indian with alcohol in any form is one hundred dollars or two months' imprisonment, yet several of them were the worse for it. Instead of carrying us back to their grim and dignified past by a display of emblematic paint designs and arrangements of feathers, many of them had borrowed such civilised incongruities as boiled shirts and bowler hats, and by this means the tom-tom's measured beat and the sonorous chant that accompanies it, lost their meaning, and the weird powwow that was to remind the white man of the days when it was danced about a heap of his forefathers' scalps, was converted into a ridiculous caper.

One figure, however, stood out in contrast to the rest of this motley gathering. The chief's daughter squatted at her disreputable old father's side, her chin in her hand, obviously bored with the whole proceedings, until the squaw race was announced, when, on a cream cayuse, with mane of eagle feathers fluttering in her wake, she won by a good length.

The powwow had been a simple affair to start, but it was quite another matter to terminate it.

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The master of ceremonies waved his arms frantically; sundry delegates were despatched to assure the performers that it had all been very nice and instructive, and that everyone was quite satisfied; the chant went monotonously on, the disreputable old chief swayed gently to the music of the tom-toms and the inexhaustible dancers continued their antics.

The affair was growing laughable, and more than one titter was heard in the grand stand.

“The next rider——” boomed the master of ceremonies, but his voice was drowned.

“Clear them out!” he shouted, turning to a group of riders; and “cleared out” they were—herded into their corner like a flock of sheep.

It was cruel but necessary, and when the chief’s two sons made a comprehensive tour of the grand stand, and returned to their fellows with a hat full of silver apiece (there is no copper coinage in the West) the authorities stood vindicated.

Another hour of blistering sunshine, unruly horses, shoutings, peanut shells, and prize distributing—two hundred dollars for the first, a hundred-dollar saddle for the second—and I wended a “bleached” but not unsatisfied way towards the hotel.



THE CHIEF'S TWO SONS



HIS DAUGHTER

XI

IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS

FOR two days after my experience of "beating" passenger trains I recouped at one of the Medicine Hat hotels, and it was here that I met my future travelling companion, a "sawn-off, hammered-down cockney" to use a prairie idiom. He was, perhaps, five feet two in the immaculate, pointed-toed shoes he always wore. His hair was plastered down to his abnormally large head, and parted in the middle with precise conformity, and he wore a turn-down collar, the suspicious spotlessness of which proclaimed it on closer inspection to be celluloid. This will have to suffice for a description of one of the biggest-hearted, quickest-witted, and most entertaining men it has been my fortune to meet.

Somewhere, sometime, back in his beloved London, he had picked up a rudimentary knowledge of piano tuning, and now, he informed me, he was possessed of a bicycle, a tuning key, two silencers and an "A" fork, whereby he made a very respectable living.

"But I want to get to the Rockies," he explained, "there ain't enough pianners round this bloomin'

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country. Five dollars a time, I get, but wot's the good er that when a feller can only make three visits in a day, and strikes one job in the three ? The Rockies the spot for yer 'umble, and I'll get there afore long."

I felt inclined to suggest that if there were more pianos in the Rockies, there might be a proportionate increase in the number of tuners, but I refrained.

"Between you and me and the gate-post," he continued, under the expanding influence of a glass of inferior beer, "I'm no great shakes at the game reely, but down 'ere they only know 'ow ter play 'ims and the like, wot uses the middle of the keyboard, so I just chunes the middle register and let the rest rip. It suits them and it suits me, so wot's the odds so long as we're 'appy ?"

By the end of the evening he seemed pleased with me, and as he appealed to me more than a little, we arranged to travel West together—but not on the rods ! I had exactly one hundred and one convincing arguments against such a proceeding.

"Slow and sure's the tip," agreed my friend, whom I will call Bill, for the reason that wild horses would not drag his real name from me. "We'll 'jump' a freight train."

That evening he contrived to sell his bicycle, and having provided ourselves with some tinned meat and bread, in the grey of the next day's dawn we waited for a passing goods train, and

“jumping” an empty timber truck, drew a tattered tarpaulin over our heads.

All that day and the following night we were jerked and jolted from siding to siding. Our intended destination was Ashcroft, a town at the head of the famous fruit-growing valley of Okanagan, British Columbia; but the following morning, owing to our uncertain mode of travel, we found ourselves on the branch line, speeding through the Crow’s Nest Pass in the very heart of the Rocky Mountains.

To our prairie-tired eyes the grandeur of the mountains was almost overwhelming, and we mentally feasted upon them until our train came to a jarring full stop outside the coal-mining and lumbering town of Fernie.

Hastily we scrambled from our lair and dashed down the embankment into the bush, where we turned to see the engine driver pointing in our direction and laughing good-humouredly. So much for the vigilance of Canadian railway employees!

At Fernie we determined to get work at a saw-mill until we found our feet and had time to look round us for something better, and that night we slept in the “bunk-house” of a saw-mill together with fifty others.

Our work consisted in standing at the dark doorway of the shed, and receiving from the “running-way” every conceivable kind of sawn timber from half-inch boards to eight-inch-square beams,

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wrestling and struggling with them across the lumber yard to their respective piles. The very uncertainty of it was rather fascinating for the first day or two. We never knew what was coming, but waited expectantly, sweat on brow, for what the archway would disclose. Often, too, it was anxious work ; our burdens came erratically, sometimes with fairly long intervals between their arrival, sometimes so quickly that we were at our wits' end to keep the running-way clear.

One day the assistant "tail sawyer" cut his hand so badly that I was promoted *pro tem.* to the distinguished office. It entailed receiving boards of a certain width from the circular saw, and wriggling them over on to the running-way. I shall never forget the agony of that eventful day. It looked so ridiculously easy when done by another. My arms ached, my hands bled, but I could not keep pace with the saw. The boards refused to wriggle where I wanted them ; a pile collected, and ultimately the saw was stopped, while I was ignominiously helped to catch up lost ground.

Next day the injured man returned and managed to do the work with his left hand ! Since then I have never called anything easy until I have tried it.

By this time Bill had found that in Fernie there were a number of pianos—and a number of tuners. So that we should have probably stayed at the saw-mill, where we were receiving forty dollars a month,

indefinitely, if it had not been for a calamity that the inhabitants of Fernie are not likely to forget for many a day.

One morning about four o'clock we were aroused from sleep by someone flinging open the bunk-house door and shouting "Fire!" at the top of his voice. We rushed outside to find it as light as day, and the town on the hill above us wreathed in flames.

All day the fire raged, licking up the wooden houses like so much paper, and defying all efforts at its suppression. I saw a nigger barber watching the demolition of his O.K. shaving saloon with tears in his eyes, as he stood shaking an impotent, black fist at the flames.

The following night the wind changed and drove the fire back to the ground it had already covered, so that it burnt itself out. But the loss of property still went on, for the colony of "dagoes" or foreigners, who worked on the railways and in the mines, raided the charred remains of the stores and houses and stole anything and everything they could lay their hands upon. One had made a collection of stolen goods, and was standing over them with a heavy crow-bar when a policeman ordered him off. He refused to go, and the officer was obliged to hold his revolver to the man's arm and fire.

It was the first time I had seen a man shot in cold blood, and it sickened me.

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This was the fire of 1903. Fernie has been burnt to the ground again since then, but still she rises from her ashes and thrives.

There was work in plenty, and at good wages, after the fire ; rebuilding stores and reconstructing telegraph lines. For two months Bill and I made four dollars a day apiece in the roofless cellar of a hardware shop that had been burnt to the ground. The fire had eaten away the wooden kegs that had contained a large stock of nails, and so melted the latter that they had become a solid mass moulded to the shape of the keg. It was our work to lift these "moulds" of nails, dash them on the concrete floor so that they burst, releasing the untouched nails in the centre, and then shovel these into fresh kegs.

I mention this to give some idea of the extraordinary tasks that may fall to a "hobo's" lot in the course of world wanderings.

One other experience I shall always remember in connection with the town of Fernie, and that was when, after the nail job was completed, I was hired as a restaurant waiter at fifty dollars a month and keep. Bill emphatically refused to become an "ash slinger," as he called it, and obtained work as an assistant carpenter in another part of the town.

It may seem a perfectly simple proceeding to don a soiled apron, take an order for a meal from a customer and bring it him on a tray, but I am

now in a position to state that waiting is a grossly deceptive operation.

Four customers took their seats at my table the first day, and I approached them with what I flattered myself was quite professional smartness, dusting imaginary crumbs from the table with my napkin and respectfully awaiting their orders. They gave me them, diverse and multitudinous, and I started blithely towards the kitchen. The cook was a Chinaman, and I could feel the gaze of that wooden-faced Oriental burning into my brain as I stammered and spluttered in frantic endeavour to remember the different dishes and beverages that had been ordered. Roast beef was one, I knew ; steak was another, I felt equally sure, and tea, and coffee ; but further than that my mind was a blank, and I was forced to go back and make fresh inquiries, with blushes that would have done credit to a schoolgirl. Even then, if you will believe me, a horrible doubt assailed me as I arranged the plates on a tray. Who had wanted which ?

The climax to my woe was yet to come, for I may remark that it is quite impossible to see one's feet over a crowded tray, and there was a hole in the linoleum that covered the restaurant floor. I stumbled, and fell with a crash into a marsh of cooked meats, tea, coffee, and broken china.

That I was discharged goes without saying, and since then I have never watched the waiter in the

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smallest restaurant without due respect and admiration.

I went over to Bill's room at the hotel, to find him lying on the bed with his left hand in a bandage.

"The bloomin' saw slipped," he explained succinctly, and we forthwith passed a resolution to shake the dust of Fernie from our feet.

XII

THE PIANO-TUNING PHOTOGRAPHIC SYNDICATE

OUR next halting-place was Ashcroft, the town we had originally intended to reach, and it was here that our Piano-tuning Photographic Syndicate came into being. Its title may suggest disconnected interests, but as an actual working combination in British Columbia I can vouch for its possibilities. For the past ten years I had dabbled in photography whenever time and circumstances permitted, and now the idea occurred to me that my knowledge of it might be turned to account.

There were many photographers in the various towns of British Columbia, I knew, but for some reason none of them seemed to find it worth his while to move from his studio and tour the country, photographing the farms, etc. Moreover, as Bill explained, "If they don't want a photograph, it's more'n likely they'll 'ave a pianner that wants chuning." And so it came about that, each on a hired bicycle, Bill with a tuning key, a silencer, and an "A" fork, myself with a quarter-plate roll-film camera, we started our tour of the Okanagan Valley.

It was mutually agreed that Bill should do the

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talking, having, as he observed, "the gift of the gab and a persuasive presence," while I waited in the road with the bicycles, ready to unstrap my camera if needed.

At the first house I lay in a ditch, convulsed with suppressed laughter, listening to the following dialogue.

"Good morning, madam."

I pictured a sweeping removal of an immaculate straw hat from a head of equally immaculately plastered hair.

"Uncommon pretty plice this." (Pause.)

"I 'ave 'ere a few samples of the work we've been doin' around these parts." (Production and display of half a dozen excellent quarter-plate photographs bought in Ashcroft and mounted on plain white cardboard.)

"Complete satisfaction guaranteed." (Pause.)

"My! what a pichur this 'ud make."

(Murmured response.)

"Only twenty-five cents apiece, glazed and mounted; speshul reductions for twelve and over."

(Another murmured response.)

"Yes, but that's amatoorish, if you'll pardon me sayin' so, madam; ours is the real thing, glazed AND mounted."

(Short murmured response and pause.)

"Well, p'raps you 'ave a pianner—"

(Short response and pause.)

"Well, now, that is strange; there ain't many

without 'em these days. But can't I persuade you to change your mind about the photo——”

(Short murmured response, the decisive shutting of a door, and the appearance of Bill's disappointed face.)

At the next house the process was repeated, and almost at once, to my utter consternation, a shrill whistle floated out to the road. This was the signal, and, unstrapping my tripod and camera with frantic haste, I hurried to the rescue.

A kindly white-haired lady and three charming girls greeted my advent with amused and disconcerting smiles. They wanted a group and two views of the house, and I repressed a wild desire to execute a hornpipe on their doorstep. Bill stood by with professional gravity, and offered quite unnecessary suggestions as to pose and lighting. Realising that the order meant seventeen shillings, my hands positively shook with anxiety, but at last it was accomplished. . . . Their piano had been tuned last week. So, promising to return in a week's time with the finished pictures, we retired to the road and grinned inanely at each other for a full minute before mounting and riding on.

“ Bit of all right,” commented Bill.

All that day we plied our trade, receiving orders here and curt denials there, but at the end of it I had run out of films, and we had taken twenty-five dollars' worth of orders.

The next day we met with equal success, but as

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Bill had at last found a piano to "chune," I was compelled to do the talking myself. But the people of British Columbia are kind, and perhaps they saw an earnest desire to please underlying my stumbling speech and rough appearance; for I had neither shiny pointed shoes, straw hat, nor plastered hair.

I shall never forget my reception at a house some miles from Ashcroft. An uncommonly pretty girl came to the door, and in answer to my stumbling suggestion that her home and orchard would make a charming picture, she clapped her hands excitedly, and led me out on to the lawn.

"It's so good of you," she gushed. "We have often wanted a view from here. Take it by all means—and you'll let us have one, won't you?"

She was quite under the impression that I was taking photographs for the love of the thing, and I hadn't the heart or the nerve to disillusion her!

My last call was at an Indian reservation, and the chief, a wealthy and intelligent Siwash, wanted a photograph of his daughter sitting beside a table, piled with rush baskets of her own making. The picture had to be taken in his living-room, and the result—will be dealt with later.

To ride about the country taking photographs was comparatively simple, but their development was quite another matter. We spent all one morning turning our bedroom into a dark-room, but still the light filtered in at the most unexpected places.

We gave unearthly yells if anyone came near the door, and got ourselves thoroughly disliked by borrowing pails and leaving a trail of water behind us as we carried them up the stairs.

At crucial moments the red lamp caught fire or went out, and all the inevitable exasperation in connection with al fresco photography was ours to the full. But when, at last, we emerged perspiring into the light of day, we had reason to congratulate ourselves on the results obtained. Only one film was ruined beyond recall; the rest were excellent.

The subsequent prints we washed in a small stream that ran through a field not far from the hotel, until one batch, with the exception of three, was consumed by a flock of ducks.

The photograph of the Indian chief's daughter was first-rate, except that on one side of the picture the lady was cut in half, the baskets being similarly treated on the other side. I was about to throw away the negative, but Bill protested, and, after printing and mounting the full half-dozen, started off on his bicycle.

In an hour he returned and solemnly handed me a dollar and a half.

“How did he take it?” I asked.

“He didn’t take it till I told ‘im,” said Bill.

“Told him what?” I demanded.

“ ‘Ow it was that the camera bein’ too small you found you couldn’t get in all the baskets and all

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'is daughter, so you thought it best to get in 'arf of each," said Bill, without a flicker of a smile.

For two months we toured the districts of beautiful British Columbia with tuning key and camera, our net earnings amounting to thirty pound apiece, but at the end of that time we were so heartily tired of confinement in a stuffy dark-room for hours on end, that we decided to make for the coast and taste the open-air life of a bushman in the interminable forests that stretch away north, south, and east of Vancouver.

XIII

FROM BUSH TO MILL

DURING my first day in Vancouver the following notice, chalked on a blackboard outside an employment agency, caught and riveted my attention :

1 Bucker.....	40 and board.
2 Swampers	35 and board.
1 Hook Tender	2 dols. a day.
2 Rigging Slingers.....	40 and board.
Sawyers	4 dols. a day.
1 Undercutter.....	40 and board.

Who and what were these "buckers," "hook tenders," and the rest ? At any rate, as far as I was concerned it remained to be discovered.

A brief interview with the harassed but obliging manager of one of the largest logging camps in British Columbia made this possible, and two days later found me in the mountains on a brief holiday, within earshot of the shrill whistles of a donkey-engine and the distant roar of falling timber.

From the moss-grown stillness of the virgin forest we at last emerged on a clearing alive with bustling activity. Men swarmed like ants over a

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litter of felled timber, uttering strange cries that were echoed by the engine's whistle. An endless steel cable scurried by our feet, dragging a clanking medley of hooks and chains. Three donkey-engines sent pillars of steam and smoke to hover about the tree-tops and disperse. A gang of Chinamen were laying rough-hewn sleepers for a new branch of the bush railway, whilst on the old one a train-load of gigantic logs awaited the engine to carry them to the coast.

Everywhere was life and movement ; it was hard to realise that, save for this tiny corner of activity, the forest lay about us for hundreds of miles still untraversed and unknown.

“ What d'you want to see ? ” demanded the foreman. He was a man of few words, a stalwart, typical British Columbia lumberman, and his dislike for the task of “ showing round a green-horn ” was written plainly on his rugged face.

“ I want,” said I, “ to follow a tree from bush to mill—do you smoke ? ”

The cigar was a good one, and under its influence things went more smoothly.

On the edge of the clearing, an “ undercutter ” was at work, swinging his double-headed axe with machine-like precision. It is his business to “ notch ” the tree, and his judgment that accounts for its falling exactly where it is wanted. This he can gauge almost to an inch, unless a strong wind is blowing, by placing the double axe in the “ notch ” and looking along its handle.



AN "UNDERCUTTER"



A "BUCKER"

Hardly has he completed the task when the sawyers make their appearance. They are picked men, and earn anything from twelve shillings to a pound a day each. Working in couples they go from tree to tree—giants of the forest, with bark sometimes six inches thick, and trunks twelve feet in circumference—first cutting with their axes two wedge-shaped holes each side of the tree and a few feet from the ground, into which they fit their steel-shod spring boards, then commencing to saw on the opposite side from the notch, the frail boards springing in unison with the swing of their arms. At last there is the suspicion of a crack, and they shout a warning, but never cease sawing ; there is another crack, like a pistol-shot, and yet another, followed by a mighty rending. Slowly the huge tree heels over, and, gaining pace as it falls, crashes down through its neighbours with a crackling and thunderous roar, to land with a thud that sets the earth trembling, and brings broken branches hurtling down about it.

No sooner is the tree down than the “limber” is upon it, cutting away its branches, then the “bucker” who saws it into lengths. The “sniper” is upon his heels, rounding the jagged ends of the log. And now is called into use man’s latest device in up-to-date logging. The main clearing, round the edge of which the trees are being felled, is encircled by an endless steel cable, worked by a donkey-engine, and carrying at intervals a stout

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chain and hook. At a given signal from the "hook tender" the engine is stopped, and one of these fastened round the log. Another signal, echoed by the donkey-engine's whistle, and the endless cable moves on, dragging the tree with irresistible force towards the skidways.

The strain on engine and cable must be terrific, for often the log carries away fair-sized standing trees in transit, crashes through tangled masses of underbrush, or ploughs deep furrows in the earth when passing over a hillock, and all the while the "hook tender" follows it with nimble foot and eagle eye, ready to give the signal—a weird little shriek, peculiarly his own—if it meets too big an obstacle.

At last it is dragged on to the skidway, bruised, battered, and bleeding resin, a sorry sight compared with the graceful pine tree of a short half-hour ago.

Even now, however, its tribulations are far from ended.

The "rigging slinger" throws his cable and hook about it, the drum of the donkey-engine starts afresh, and, with the aid of the "gin pole," it rolls slowly on to the trucks.

There is a shriek down in the valley, echoed and re-echoed up the mountain sides, a white puff of smoke against the blue haze of the tree-tops, and the engine sweeps out into the clearing like some devouring monster of the bush.



THE FALL OF A GIANT



THE DONKEY-ENGINE, "RIGGING SLINGER," AND "GIN POLE" AT WORK

A few terse orders, men scurrying to their task of setting the brakes, and the long, black snake of logs and trucks glides slowly down the grade.

From my post on the cow-catcher of the engine, the scene is one of extraordinary grandeur. Rolling, wooded mountains as far as the eye can reach, and far, far below, a glimpse of the blue Pacific Ocean. But other sensations were at war with my appreciation of the beautiful ; the engine sways perilously as it rounds a rocky curve.

The brakes shriek their disapproval, the trucks groan under their burden—and there is the ghost of a smile on the grimy face of the engineer that tells me he has exceeded the speed limit purely for the benefit of the “green-horn.” I set my teeth and try to look unconcerned.

My reward is the ultimate slackening of pace as we glide out on to the wharf. Here a gang of men is waiting to unload, and the logs fall with a mighty splash into the sea. A boom is formed by an encircling band of chained logs, and when full is towed down the coast by tugs.

At the mill, an endless chain, studded at intervals with steel teeth, carries the logs from sight until they reappear at the other end of the sheds in the form of sawn timber.

Such is the day of reckoning in the life of the British Columbian fir tree.

XIV

LIFE IN A LUMBER CAMP

So much for the present-day methods employed in a British Columbia lumber camp, but what of the actual life of the men engaged in this strenuous work, and more especially, how does the tender-foot fare at their hands ? I was soon to learn.

The city of Vancouver was a revelation to Bill, with its broad, well-kept streets, its bustling throngs of business men, clanging tram-cars and brightly-lighted shops. He was in his element once more, and opened out like a flower that has languished long in uncongenial soil. He bought ties of fearsome colour and design, a new suit of clothes of striped pattern, and a pair of American shoes that put even their predecessors in the shade. We went to the theatre and heard raucous-voiced comedians with red noses and elongated boots propound nasal wit.

For two days we were sorry dogs, but at last we repaired to one of the agencies that abound in Vancouver, and obtained for a fee of one dollar a head, posts as loaders at thirty-five dollars a month and keep, in one of the largest lumber camps in Canada.



THE QUICK AND THE DEAD



A "BOOM" OF LOGS AND ITS MANIPULATOR

It may be mentioned here that when the employment agent is not a scoundrel he is a very useful person ; but the exceptions are so rare, that if there is any possibility of obtaining work direct from an employer it is best to do so.

On arrival at the camp we were told to select our beds in the bunk-house, and report to the mill foreman. The " beds," about seventy of them, were made on the floor, covered with straw, and divided from one another by small logs, round all four walls of the room. We had selected the softest we could find when we heard a shrill whistle given by the engine that worked the mill, and two minutes later we were surrounded by a swarm of perspiring men, representing pretty nearly every nationality under the sun. There were hulking great Swedes, burly negroes, swarthy Italians, thin, wiry Americans and Canadians, and cockneys—all laughing and joking, and indulging in horse-play like a crowd of schoolboys.

Suddenly what sounded like a megaphone gave two loud toots from some neighbouring building, and a general stampede ensued. Bill and I followed at a more leisurely pace.

The cause of it all proved to be dinner.

Never had I seen food consumed at such speed ! It was literally bolted whole, and the diners were outside, passing away the rest of the hour, allowed at noon, by smoking and chewing, long before Bill and I had got fairly under way. The food, though

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plain, is always good and wholesome in British Columbia lumber camps, and, needless to say, we did it full justice.

Once more the whistle blew, but, strange to say, there was no stampede this time, the men lounging back to mill and bush as though each man's life depended on his getting there last.

Bill and I lost no time in reporting ourselves to the mill foreman, a sharp-featured, wiry little man, who promptly took us to an implement shed and gave us each a canthook.

There is no need to describe this instrument of torture to both patience and muscle, for I hope and trust, for his own benefit, that no reader of these memoirs will ever have to handle one. Suffice it to say that it is intended to assist in rolling logs.

Bill and I were then placed at the end of a skidway about seventy yards long, made of two lines of pine logs spliced together, running parallel about twenty feet apart, and slanting downwards at an acute angle. Down this we were told to roll logs, varying from four to six feet across the butt, as they were brought in from the bush by the teamsters. At the end of the skidway a little truck, hauled by a wire cable, stood in readiness on its tramway to carry them up to the saw.

Having given us our instructions and made a survey of our personal appearance, which seemed to cause him some amusement, the mill foreman

withdrew, leaving us to our fate in a drenching rain.

Oh, the agonies of the following three hours ! An awful feeling of absolute incompetence overwhelmed me when I nearly gouged Bill's eye with my unwieldy canthook, in my vain endeavours to keep a refractory giant of the forest from running off the skidway.

To add to our discomfort the rain fell unremittingly, and we stumbled about in ankle-deep mud. Bill's hat had long ago been crushed into unrecognisable pulp beneath a huge spruce log that, despite our united efforts, ran right off the skidway.

At last, however, we managed to get five logs safely on to the truck, and, with a pleasing sense of importance at having machinery under his control, Bill climbed up a rickety little iron ladder and pulled the lever that had been pointed out to us as connecting the cable of the truck to the engine.

My heart swelled as I saw our majestic load, the result of so much strenuous toil, sail gracefully up the incline on its way to the saw, but I was a little nervous. Of course, we knew nothing of loading logs, and about half-way up the incline, one of them started to wobble suspiciously. Next minute my heart was in my mouth—the truck was over-balancing ! For a moment it tottered on two wheels ; then, with a dull thud, load, truck and

all disappeared over the side. A shower of sawdust flew skywards, and an ominous silence ensued.

The engine stopped, and heads peered at us from every window and door in the mill—grinning heads, laughing heads, disgusted heads. They looked still more disgusted when ordered to get out and help us unearth the truck from the pile of sawdust into which it had fallen.

The crisis of our experience, however, was yet to come.

We had succeeded in completely stopping the mill four times through inability to supply logs fast enough, and I was carefully manœuvring a gigantic pine down the skidway, despite the unaccountable gymnastics of my canthook, when I suddenly realised that the log was getting the better of me in speed, and also running off the skidway. I yelled to Bill and he ran to help.

“When I say go!” he said breathlessly, “jab yer cant’ook into it an’ ‘ang on. We’ve gotter stop it. One, two, three—go!”

There was no need to “jab.” The impetus the great log had gained caught my hook in its flight, and the same thing must have happened to Bill’s, for the next minute we were flipped off our feet simultaneously, like a couple of flies, turned completely over with the log, and landed prone and half stunned between the skids, the log passing above us about three inches from our faces.

That settled it. We determined that the cant-

hook could never really be our forte. Great as was our ambition in that direction, the trials incidental to the acquirement of the art were somewhat too severe. We rebelled ; we wouldn't stand it. It wasn't white man's work anyway—at least, that's what Bill said.

We were chaffed unmercifully that night, the great question about which our tormentors seemed most curious being as to whether our mothers knew we were out. The matter seemed to cause them unnecessary anxiety.

At first Bill took all this in good part and laughed with the rest, but when chaff slowly merged into insult, and that from a hulking mulatto with a head like a bullet and a neck like a bull, I saw the light of rebellion flash suddenly into my friend's eye, and knew that there would shortly be trouble.

Here I must explain that, whatever the status of the negro in other countries, in the lumber camps of the West he is the equal of the white, at least, in his own opinion ; and when that opinion is backed by gigantic strength and an almost entire disregard for bodily pain, except on the shins, it is apt to carry some weight. At any rate it was pretty evident to me that this mulatto was by way of being "monarch of all he surveyed" in that particular camp, and I trembled for Bill.

However, the trouble did not come till later, for songs, solos on the mouth organ, and step-

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dancing were soon in full swing, and, after showing the natives what he could do in the way of step-dancing, Bill succeeded in making himself quite popular. The mulatto, however, seemed to have taken a distinct dislike to him, for he scowled and sulked in his bunk instead of joining in the general festivities.

At last the fatal mistake was made. On being genially told that if he was only half as good on the canthook as he was at step-dancing he might be some good, Bill replied with spirit that the former "wasn't a white man's job anyway," and that he had no wish to shine in that direction.

The retort was perfectly innocent of ill-feeling, and yet with one accord all eyes turned towards the mulatto.

Nothing happened, but the silence was ominous. Shortly after, however, the thunderbolt fell. On being asked to sing, Bill favoured the company with the ditty, "Coon, Coon, Coon, I Wish My Colour Would Fade," in his best tenor.

He had the negro dialect down to a fine art, and the result, when performed elsewhere, had usually called forth salvos of applause. But now dead silence greeted his efforts, and once more all eyes were riveted on the mulatto. In vain I screwed my face into every species of contortion intended to convey disapproval and warning; Bill sang on unheeding.

It all happened very quietly. The mulatto

waited till about half the song had been sung ; then, putting aside his pipe, he slowly rose from his bunk and walked up to the blissfully unconscious performer.

“ Mebbe,” he said, in a slow drawl—“ mebbe you think that funny ? ”

If a bucket of cold water had been suddenly doused over poor Bill’s head, the damping of his ardour could not have been more completely effected. He turned first red, then white, and finally dismounted from the packing-case on which he had been seated.

“ I was doin’ me best to amuse the company,” he said coolly.

“ Waal, it didn’t amuse me worth a cent,” was the rejoinder.

Then the light which I knew so well flashed into Bill’s eyes, and I saw that for weal or woe there was going to be a fight.

“ Oh,” said Bill, and there was a slight tremor in his voice, “ then you’d better get outside and let me finish the song for the rest of the crowd.”

The mulatto’s thick lips parted in a smile that was not good to look at, displaying a double row of glistening, yellow teeth.

“ Mebbe,” he continued, with the same slow drawl, and with his bullet head at a reflective angle—“ mebbe you think I’m a coon ? ”

You could have heard a pin drop in any part of that bunk-house. Bill leant carelessly against the

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packing-case and looked full into the mulatto's eyes.

"I ain't thought about it," he said, mimicking his adversary's drawl—"but judgin' from yer face I'd say you was a pretty fair imitation."

"Waal, now we've got something to go on. You say I'm a coon. I say I'm not; and I'll prove it. To start off, if I'd been a nigger I'd have flattened your face ten minutes ago; but as I ain't, I'll wait till I've taken off my coat to do it. See?"

My respect for Bill had always been high, but it went up three notches when I saw that he never flinched.

"If you think that the flattening of my fice will prove that black's white, I'm willin' to 'elp science," he said. "But if—"

The rest of the sentence was never finished, for the mulatto threw his coat on the ground, and with a bound, shot a leg-of-mutton fist straight at Bill's face.

If it had ever reached its mark, the flattening process before mentioned would have been an accomplished fact, but Bill was short, thick-set, and quick as an eel. Like lightning he ducked, and his adversary's fist went clean through the packing-case against which he had been leaning. Then, with a back-hander, he hit the mulatto a resounding crack on his woolly head.

The blow might as well have struck a block of wood for all the effect that it had. Twice Bill hit

his opponent full on the nose, but the mulatto merely wiped away the blood with the back of his hand and continued as though nothing had happened.

Now if this narrative had been an orthodox, stirring piece of romance, I could have made Bill stretch his enemy on the ground in a single round, and everyone would have been satisfied; but as I am dealing with facts, I am forced to admit that the exact opposite happened, and in this way. The mulatto, getting tired of his repeated and ineffectual attempts to get anywhere near Bill, who seemed able to be in two places at the same time, made one frantic rush like an enraged bull, straight at his enemy, received three crashing blows straight in the face as though they had been flies, caught him round the waist with a pair of arms that fairly bulged yellow-black muscle, and tossed the unfortunate Bill high above his head. Then, taking a fresh and careful hold of his trousers, he dashed him head foremost into one of the bunks that lined the wall.

Bill sat up in the bunk with some teeth missing, and looked at his conqueror.

" You clinched," he said, wiping the blood from his lips, " but I suppose you don't know no better, and I don't see 'ow you've proved black's white, neither."

The mulatto was in a far worse state than Bill, and I suppose he realised it, for, after glaring at

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his victim through half-closed eyes, he returned to his bunk without a word, satisfied that he had done and received enough damage for one evening.

“ Bill,” I said, as I bandaged my friend’s face, “ let’s get out of this right away. We’ll only get into more trouble.”

“ Get out be sugared ! ” he replied. “ I’m just beginnin’ to feel at ‘ome.”

One incident during those days in the lumber camp often returns to my mental vision with the vividness of a nightmare. One day a morose, grey-haired man came to the camp, and was put to “ swamping ” with the rest of us. He was very deaf, and for this reason, as well as on account of his retiring disposition, hardly anyone spoke to him. But soon a would-be wag discovered that by giving a shrill shout he could make the unfortunate man nearly jump out of his skin for fear of a falling tree, and from that time on the process of “ shouting Old Grouch ” was a standing witticism for anyone who wished to raise a laugh—and there are plenty of those the world over. At last he became more or less accustomed to it, and the joke looked like dying a natural death, until one day, in a high wind, a gigantic tree that the sawyers had been attacking most of the morning began to topple the wrong way.

We ran like startled rabbits, leaving “ Old Grouch ” directly in its path. The sawyers shouted,

we all shouted, but he went serenely on with his work, determined not to give an opening for a renewal of the worn-out joke. Not until the tree came crashing through its neighbours did he realise there was anything genuinely amiss. He looked up, and then stood stock-still, paralysed with fear, till the tree fell to earth—with both his legs beneath it !

His daughter came three days later to see him in the camp hospital, and when she left him there was an assembly of two hundred lumbermen waiting for her with a presentation purse of five hundred dollars.

For three months we worked from camp to camp, until one night I went to my straw bed with teeth chattering and body seized with convulsive shiverings. I found it almost impossible to stand, my head swam and ached abominably, and a deathly sickness stole over me.

In the morning the camp doctor told me it was "mountain sickness," a disease peculiar to the Rocky Mountains, and ordered me to bed for two weeks. Everyone was kindness itself, once more demonstrating the genuine soft-heartedness of the British Columbia lumberman ; but at the end of that time I crawled from bed out of the camp, out of the Rocky Mountains, and down to the coast, feeling very like an adventurous schoolboy who has been whipped. I never saw Bill again.

XV

'FRISCO !

UNDER these circumstances, it occurred to me that a sea voyage would probably restore my health sooner than anything, and it was this that prompted my trip from Vancouver to San Francisco by boat ; though I must confess an ever-growing wanderlust and the love of fresh experience played an important part in the laying of my plans.

When I arrived, it happened to be the first anniversary of the great earthquake, and the city was a forest of scaffolding and steam cranes. Huge blocks of stone and concrete hung suspended above the streets on their way to clothe the towering "quake-proof" steel frameworks that rose from the debris of former buildings like gigantic skeletons. Hills of bricks, mortar, and plaster confronted the pedestrian at every turn, and the dust from these and the streets generally made the city a blinding, choking wilderness.

The fleas, too ! In company with many another visitor I shall never quite forget the San Francisco flea. He is fat and friendly, so fat and friendly that one man told me laughingly that he had come

to look upon them as household pets, and called them by name.

The demand for labour in rebuilding had drawn to the city the very dregs of humanity throughout the Americas, and strikes, street riots and robberies with violence were of daily occurrence. The authority of the police was a sinecure. Fat, good-natured giants in white uniforms, with truncheons swinging from their wrists, leant against hoardings at street corners and smoked cigarettes, or earnestly requested a striker who became more than usually vociferous to "Cut it out," or "Go way back and sit down."

It appears that in "'Frisco" the cheapest way of living is by drinking, for by buying five cents' worth of inferior beer, one is entitled to eat at a free lunch counter adjacent to the bar, and have a cut from the joint and cheese and biscuits *ad lib.*

To a world-wanderer like myself, whose income was, to say the least, precarious, this was a great institution. It was at one of these counters that I met a would-be guide, philosopher, and friend, in the form of a gaunt youth who, after a brief exchange of civilities, professed the desire to show me a little of "'Frisco's under-life"—at my expense. He promised me Chinese opium and gambling-dens, and orgies in subterranean dancing-halls, with attendant excitements undreamed of by my prosaic mind.

Such an appeal to the adventure-loving spirit that lies hidden in most of us was irresistible. I closed with the offer, and after investing in a cheap revolver, that was quite as likely to hurt the man behind it as the one in front, we set out for the less frequented parts of the city. Down by the docks the streets were dark and deserted, and my guide improved the occasion by relating the various "sand-baggings" and assaults that had distinguished the quarter during the past week.

The only lighted shop we passed was a small tobacco booth, where I stopped to buy cigarettes. This could hardly have taken me more than two minutes, yet when I stepped out into the street I found my unfortunate guide lying face downwards on the pavement, with a thin stream of red creeping from his forehead towards the gutter. For a brief moment I thought he had fainted; then I saw his clothes had been rifled, and, glancing up the street, discerned the dim outline of three dark figures trotting silently and apparently without haste into the gloom.

A wave of anger took possession of me. The cowardly assailants evidently thought they would get off scot-free after an easy and profitable night's work. I longed to give them at least a scare for their money.

Leaving my companion, still insensible, to the care of the tobacconist, I dashed up the street in pursuit. My footfalls echoed along the deserted

thoroughfare like rifle-shots, so I hastily discarded my boots and continued the chase in socks.

Rather to my surprise I soon came in sight of the three figures in front, who had now dropped into a leisurely walk. This confidence in their security for some reason angered me the more, and in the deep shadows of a wall I crept nearer and drew the revolver from my pocket.

I had never shot a man in my life, and for the first time I experienced the dread of doing this in cold blood. Then I remembered my companion's gaunt figure prone on the pavement, and the fact that but for a packet of cigarettes I should have certainly shared the same fate. I fired—low down.

The men scattered like startled rabbits. Two darted down by-streets on opposite sides of the road, while the third took an abrupt seat on the pavement and examined his leg, evidently more concerned about his wound than the chance of escape.

As I rushed down the turning to the left I sighted my second quarry scrambling over a mound of bricks. He turned and saw me at the same instant, and then began a chase and obstacle-race combined, under conditions that are probably unique. Over mounds of sand, lime, and broken brick ; through mazes of scaffolding, barrels, planks, and wheel-barrows, pools of muddy water and quagmires of soft mortar we went. My bootless feet were soon battered and bruised, but the fever of the chase

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was in my veins, and as long as my quarry was in sight I felt incapable of abandoning the pursuit.

The fugitive was now hardly thirty feet ahead, and I dashed after him round a corner of scaffolding, confident that I had run him to earth ; and I did, but not in the way expected. He had crouched low just round the corner, and, unable to stop myself, I fell headlong over his body. It was an old trick, and I scrambled to my feet anathematising myself for a fool, but my man had vanished. With slightly cooler blood and a bruised head I had just decided to leave matters where they stood, when I heard a gentle rasping and looked up to find him clinging to a scaffold-pole above my head. I could see his white face looking down at me.

“ What are you going to do about it ? ” he demanded breathlessly.

“ Come down and you’ll see,” said I sternly.

When at last we stood facing each other, however, I found myself at a loss. He was a mere boy, with a wizened, old-young face and cunning eyes, that took me in from hatless head to socked feet with a callous insolence that rather appealed to me. What was I going to do about it ? The police of San Francisco were either asleep or smoking cigarettes in more salubrious quarters of the city ; and it was next to impossible to give him in charge, so I took the law into my own hands.

“ Hand over what you took,” said I, “ and you shall go.”

"The others went through him," he replied sullenly; "I don't know how much they got."

"Shall we call it twenty-five dollars at a minimum?" I suggested.

His face expressed neither approval nor dissent, but he drew from a ragged pocket a large gold watch.

"Guess that'll cover it," he said coolly, and on examination I found that it did by fully another twenty-five dollars.

When, after considerable difficulty, I found my way back to the tobacconist, my companion had recovered consciousness and, with a bandaged head, sat up to hear my report.

"How much did you lose?" was my question.

"Nothing," he said; "I haven't a cent in the world."

"Then here's something to be going on with," said I, and handed him the watch.

After the foregoing, it is with some reluctance that I relate what happened two days later, but the experience is so typical of San Franciscan under-life that I can hardly allow it to pass unrecorded. My own part in the affair was entirely reprehensible, and I need say no more, for everyone knows that while confession may be good for the soul, it is rarely compatible with personal dignity.

I wished to go to a certain theatre, and asked

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the way of the first pedestrian I met. He smilingly informed me that I was going in precisely the opposite direction, and that, as he happened to be passing the doors himself, he would show me the way. During the next five minutes I learnt that my guide was also a stranger in San Francisco, and that he had come from Canada. This naturally supplied a connecting link in our reminiscences, and we entered the first bar to improve the occasion. He certainly knew the Canadian prairie like a book, and his anecdotes of ranch and bush life were so interesting that the theatre was soon forgotten and we settled down for a chat.

It appeared that he had tired of the rough life of the plains, and after a course of study had become a telegraph operator in Denver. While there he had been approached by a gang of "wire-tappers"—those who intercept telegraphic messages by establishing secret connections on branch wires, thus gaining news of races in advance of the general public—with a view to his becoming a confederate, but he had refused. A few weeks later he heard of their capture, and went to see the trial and conviction of the entire gang.

Now, however, they were again at large, for he had recognised their leader that very day in the streets of San Francisco, and without a doubt he was engaged in his old nefarious business.

My companion's idea was to make a round of the city pool-rooms, where they receive news of the

races by wire, and, if he encountered the wire-tapper, force him by threats of exposure to divulge what horse he was going to back.

"There might be some brisk fun," he said.
"Would you care to come and see it?"

This appealed to me rather more than the theatre, and we accordingly started a careful tour of every pool-room in the city. They were dark, dusty places, swarming with a heterogeneous collection of humanity that ceaselessly shuffled and elbowed round boards bearing notices of the odds and winners, while a sleek gentleman in faultless attire stood on a rostrum at the end of the room and acted as "bookie."

The fruitlessness of my companion's search was growing a trifle monotonous, when, on entering the fourth of these rooms, he seized my arm and nodded in the direction of a tall, stout man, who had emerged from the crowd and stood counting over a large roll of bills. At last he seemed satisfied, slipped an elastic band round the roll, and strolled out into the street.

"Come on," whispered my companion excitedly ;
"that's my man."

Not far from the door he tapped the stranger on the shoulder. The tall man faced about with surprising swiftness.

"What d'you want?" he snapped.

"I know all about you," said my companion evenly.

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The collapse was sudden. The tall man's jaw dropped perceptibly.

"Come further away and I'll listen to you," he said, with a furtive glance at the pool-room doors.

Round a quiet corner, my companion stated his business, and the wire-tapper brought out his roll of bills and fingered them feverishly.

"This is blackmail," he whined; "but how much do you want?"

"It's not blackmail, and I want none of your money," protested the other indignantly. "All you have to do is to take my money and place it on the right horse. Here are ten dollars for a start. I shall watch you go in and come out of the pool-room from this corner."

The wire-tapper had hardly left us when a little boy of thirteen or fourteen ran up to him with a note; then he disappeared through the swinging doors.

Presently the wire-tapper came out and, without a word, counted thirty dollar bills into the other's hand.

"This price was only two to one," he explained apologetically.

"Never mind," said my companion; "better luck next time. Just place this thirty dollars for me, and that will do for the present."

The process was repeated, and this time ninety dollars changed hands; but the wire-tapper was evidently nervous and anxious to be gone, and

when the other tentatively suggested a third attempt he refused point-blank on the grounds that if he won any more that day it would arouse suspicion. This objection, however, was overruled by the other offering to place the money himself.

“And we’ll make the amount worth while ; shall we ?” he added, turning to me. “Do you feel inclined to join me in a hundred-dollar bet ?”

Fifty dollars meant a good deal to me, but the two or three hundred it would bring in meant a good deal more, so I took the plunge. After another note had exchanged hands between the wire-tapper and the boy, he told us to back Rough Diamond for the next race, and threw in fifty dollars as his own stake ; then we took up our position on the opposite pavement and waited expectantly.

To my surprise my companion soon appeared and exultantly informed us that he had succeeded in placing our stake on Rough Diamond to win at three to one.

“To win ?” roared the wire-tapper.

“Yes, to win,” retorted the other feebly.

The wire-tapper literally danced on the pavement.

“You fool !” he sputtered ; “I told you to back the horse for a place this time—it has come in third.”

He turned to me.

“ Didn’t I say for a place ?” he snapped vehemently.

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But I took no further interest in the proceedings. In Western parlance, I had been "done brown." The men were confederates and all that was left for me to do was to swallow my medicine without grimacing. So I smiled blandly, congratulated them on their acting, and left them to marvel at man's credulity.

It all sounds very foolish and easy, set down in black and white, but the San Franciscan "confidence man," by long and unhampered practice, has reduced his methods to a fine art. And although it is hardly likely that any respectable, level-headed reader of these confessions would fall a victim to his wiles, such a thing has been known to occur to others, and if the foregoing personal experience helps to put these on their guard, the purpose of its recounting will be served.

XVI

THE LONGEST WAY ROUND

ON returning to Vancouver, I met a Cambridge man fallen on evil days, wearing a faded Norfolk jacket, a collarless shirt, a straggling beard and greasy blue overalls. I had often heard of such derelicts drifting about the world, but had never as yet met with one. The man's appearance was a study in itself, and it was the strangest thing to hear the voice and speech of a cultured gentleman coming from such an unlikely source. He steadfastly avoided talking of his past life, beyond mentioning his college, and I naturally refrained from questioning him ; but he readily talked of his work in a salmon cannery near Vancouver, and picturesquely described a fight with the foreman, and the blow with the hammer he had received on the back of his head, from which he was then recovering.

“ Take my advice,” he said one night, as we sat smoking in the hall of our third-rate hotel, “ and if ever you get into a fight in this country, forget Queensberry rules. Knock your man down at once, and then look round for the first thing handy

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to defend yourself with. It's not exactly their fault, but they know no fairness of method. To them there is no distinction between above and below the belt ; and if a boot or an axe is likely to do more damage than the fist, they'll use it without the least compunction."

We talked and compared notes till the early hours, and as we talked—of Australia, New Zealand, the South Pacific Islands and our longing to see them—the wander-lust gripped me afresh.

"I'm past it now," said my new-found acquaintance, with a wistful note in his voice. "Continual disappointment—set-back after set-back—takes it out of a man. My ambition and snap are dead, but if only—" and he launched forth on an itemised account of what he would do with five years of his misspent life returned to him and a hundred pounds in cash.

As for me, during the next few days the desire to move on became a perfect obsession, undermining every other inclination, and at last it conquered me. I determined to return to my ranch—via Honolulu, Fiji, New Zealand and Australia ! This may sound a rather ambitious programme for one possessed of exactly thirty pounds, but the amount, I knew, was enough to see me to Australia, and for the rest I would trust to luck. It was a chance of seeing the world that might never again come my way.

And so it came about that in a week's time I was leaning over the rail of a Canadian-Australian mail steamer, waving my work-worn hat in farewell to the crowded quay at Vancouver docks.

As day after day sped by, the great ship forged through a sea of inconceivable blue, peopled with the strangest denizens, from ungainly hammer-head sharks and playful porpoises to delicately beautiful flying-fish that skimmed the water like swallows, with flashes of emerald-green body and silver wing. Slowly it is borne in on the mind of the passenger that one is approaching a new world, a world as different from that left behind as it is possible to conceive.

When at last its outskirts burst upon us—the Sandwich Islands, with their waving cocoanut palms and spotless coral shores, and the capital, Honolulu, lying snugly sheltered by the long-extinct crater of Diamond Head—the Englishman in me instinctively heaved a sigh of covetousness. If only they belonged to us! But they do not, and America is to be congratulated not only on these possessions, but on the unqualified condition of prosperity to which she has brought them. Here I determined to stay until the arrival of the next boat, in three weeks' time, and since those days no country under a flag other than the Union Jack has ever called me to return with half the insistence of fairy-like Honolulu.

Around an oval of coral sand are dotted resi-

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dential houses with their lanais, or verandas, supported on wooden posts, jutting out over the blue Pacific and making it possible to take one's morning dip from one's bedroom window. The temperature of the water never goes below 65 degrees, and one may wear a bathing-suit all day long, and, with a dressing-gown over it, have meals at one of the restaurants that adjoin the palm-fringed beach.

The booming of the surf out at the reef ceaselessly calls swimmers to take out their surf-boards and—lying on them, if novices, and standing if practised—speed shorewards on the summit of a Pacific roller. This is the chief sport of both whites and natives at Honolulu, and requires a good deal more knack than might be supposed.

My first attempt was a hopeless failure. In some way I must have shifted my weight on the frail surf-board, for in a trice the great roller on which I rode caught me like a feather, and hurled me downwards through a trough of seething foam to hit my head on the coral bed below. I rose to the surface half stunned, and someone seized my arm or I should certainly have drowned.

Then how fascinating were the reefs ! I longed for the lungs of a pearl-diver, that I might stay longer below, exploring the submarine gardens of delicate coral and swaying weeds, with their strange fish striped with vivid colours like aquatic zebras, and ghastly devil-fish with their trailing antennæ and fleshy bodies.

In the evening the native string band plays down on the beach while Honolulu and his wife stroll among the palm groves or sip coffee on the restaurant lanais. The Hawaiian is a born musician, favouring the 'cello, violin, guitar and mandolin, and I lay on the sand in the moonlight wondering if it were really worth while returning to the struggles and disappointments of the outside world. But all good things must have an end, and in time the boat arrived and departed, bearing me on to Fiji.

During this stage of my journey we crossed the equator, and the event was celebrated with all the attendant pomp of Father Neptune's "Court." The custom is rapidly dying out, so I was glad when permission had been obtained from the captain to carry it through.

We had just finished lunch when a bugle sounded, and we hurried on deck in time to see Neptune climb sedately over the ship's rail on to the deck. His flowing beard of rope-ends fell to his knees, his trident bore a sorry-looking herring impaled on its points, and the field glasses with which he looked about him for his men were composed of two beer bottles spliced side by side. But he made an impressive picture, and when his "devils" and "policemen"—powerful fo'castle hands blackened from head to foot, and decorated with brightly-dyed tufts of rope—rallied round him, more than one of the passengers who had an inkling of

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what was to follow, disappeared quietly to their cabins.

The "policemen" were a zealous force, and while the procession filed towards the tank, made of waterproof ship's awning and containing five feet of water, they hustled us like sheep on to the lower deck.

My recollections of that ceremony are a trifle mixed, but what I do distinctly remember is being seized forcibly from behind and carried bodily to the hatchway, where I was plumped on to a form opposite Neptune's throne. My shirt was opened at the throat, and my chest and face thoroughly plastered with an evil-smelling concoction of flour, water, tar, and paint. Then Neptune, bawling at me through a megaphone, demanded how I liked entering his new domain, and when I opened my mouth to answer, the brush with which I had been plastered was thrust into it, the form was tipped up and I fell head over heels into the tank. The "devils" then proceeded to give me a thorough ducking, and I finally crawled from their hands feeling, and I am sure looking, like a half-drowned kitten.

One American, I remember, refused to pay his tribute, and locked himself in his cabin, but the "police" burst open the door, and, when he fired at the ceiling with a revolver to frighten them off, seized him, fully dressed, and threw him neck and crop into the tank. It is better to conform to rules

gracefully than be forced to obey them when Father Neptune takes command of a ship !

I stayed nearly three months in Fiji, the next port of call ; not because I had intended to, but because of the unequalled hospitality of the inhabitants, black and white. Forty years ago the white visitor to Fiji would probably have furnished a meal for a horde of naked savages. To-day he is received with the utmost courtesy by the natives and altogether spoilt by the Europeans.

If ten English people were asked, " Where is Fiji, and to whom does it belong ? " it is more than likely that nine of them would not be able to answer either question ; yet over there, on the other side of the world, tucked away in the " Milky Way " of the Pacific, is a thriving colony, where almost anything will grow, where there is good land and plenty of it, a healthy climate where, by the way, malarial fever is unknown, and the guarantee of the Union Jack, only waiting for Britain to send energetic settlers to further its already established prosperity.

The history of the occupation of Fiji has been dealt with too often to call for mention here, and in these notes I shall confine myself, as far as possible, to my own personal experiences throughout the group, and such information about its resources as I have not seen touched upon elsewhere.

The first thing that strikes one on landing at

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Suva—the capital of Fiji and the metropolis of the South Sea Islands—is its backwardness, as a town, when compared with Honolulu. We are slower-moving than the Americans, and this must account for the unfavourable light in which Suva appears when compared with the capital of the Hawaiian Islands as it invariably is by the hosts of passengers who alight at both ports on their way to Australia. Also it is rather unfortunately placed in one of the雨iest quarters of Fiji. On the whole, Suva, although exceedingly picturesque and interesting, is the worst argument for Fiji. Apart from it, the group can hardly be equalled and certainly not excelled by any for the natural, rugged beauty and fertility of its country and the fascination of its people.

During my first week there, I had the good fortune to be invited on a launch to watch a hunt that is probably unique. I had followed the chase of one kind and another in a good many countries, but it was in Fiji that I first witnessed the capture of a shark.

None but natives dare engage in the work, and then only the best and pluckiest swimmers. At midday the sun is so powerful that even the shark feels the heat, and lies dormant with as much as he can get of his head and body sheltered under the overhanging coral. For some time we cruised about the coral beds searching for our quarry, and at last one of the natives who went before us in one



THE SHIP'S WAKE



RIDING ON A SURF BOARD AT HONOLULU

of their quaint outrigger canoes, pointed and waved his arms excitedly, and we looked down through the clear water to see a dark object, which we knew to be a shark's tail, protruding from the reef.

A native quickly caught up a rope, noosed at one end, and slid silently into the water. Down he went, his sleek brown body leaving a trail of silver bubbles in its wake. Reaching the tail, he stopped, and holding on to the reef with the hand that carried the rope, cautiously extended the other under the shark's body. He was tickling it for all the world as one tickles trout.

It would have been almost ludicrous if it had not been so wildly exciting. The slightest bungle and the shark would have turned. But no, one dark arm was still extended while the other with the rope crept slowly towards the creature's tail. A quick movement and the noose was about it, and the natives in the canoe pulling on the end and shouting wildly, while their companion shot to the surface and scrambled aboard. Then they pulled, slackened and pulled again, playing with the shark as though it were some gigantic salmon, until the black tail appeared above the water and a dozen knives were at work.

The natives prize a shark, both for its fins, which are excellent eating, and its oil. So that night there were great rejoicings in the village. A meke or dance was arranged, and it was at this

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function that the owner of the launch presented me with a letter of introduction to Ratu Kadavu Levu, who, as the grandson of King Thakabau and to-day paramount chief of the Fijis, deserves a chapter to himself.

XVII

A DAY WITH A SOUTH SEA PRINCE

NESTLING close to the coast of Viti Levu, the principal island of the Fiji group, is a tiny sun-kissed island of volcanic rock, green grasses, and waving cocoanut palms. This is Mbau, the old-time capital of the Fijis, and here, fifty years ago, lived Thakabau the King, holding his throne by right of arms in the midst of cannibalism, rapine, and wars so devastating and interminable, that he was at length forced to hand his country over to stronger hands in order that he might have peace in his old age.

To-day his grandson, Ratu Kadavu Levu, lives on this same island—a well-educated, well-read man of the world, a member of the Legislative Assembly, a sportsman, an ideal host, and a loyal subject of the King. So much travellers may learn during the first week in Fiji, but of the man and his private life among his own people they know nothing, and are never likely to learn more. He shuns publicity like the plague, and when his official duties in Suva are over, he retires to his island home, and lives his real life among those whom he understands and who understand him.

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It was late in the afternoon when our launch drew near the island of Mbau, after an all-too-hasty passage up the beautiful Rewa river. A native outrigger canoe shot from some hidden cove of the island, poled by a girl of perhaps fifteen, straight and lissom as a larch, a white sulu (short skirt) wound about her from waist to knee, her hair ornamented with red hibiscus blossoms. Suddenly she caught sight of us and hastily put back to shore with the news, so that when we landed a cortège of beaming natives stood awaiting our arrival. It is impossible, by the way, to pay a surprise visit to the remotest village in Fiji; in some miraculous way the inhabitants are invariably warned of a stranger's approach, and turn out *en masse* to meet and welcome him.

As I stepped from the boat, everybody said "Sayadra" (welcome); so I said "Sayadra" too, and told my boy to explain that I wished to see the Roko, this being Ratu Kadavu's official English title. Everybody smiled blandly and talked to everybody else, and that was all. A repetition of the request only elicited further argument and grave shakings of brown heads, capped with six-inch-long hair. Then I took matters into my own hands and strode through their midst.

Mbau is by far the most picturesque village near Viti Levu. The houses, built of good Fijian timber, bamboos, leaves and sinnet, run in a semicircle round the seashore, facing the Pacific Ocean, and

backing on to a level, well-kept stretch of green-sward.

Instinctively I made for the largest house in the place, the welcoming committee following tentatively in my wake, evidently with a view to seeing the nature of my reception before committing themselves as my conductors.

Suddenly my boy touched me on the shoulder.
“Him Roko!” he whispered, and disappeared.

I looked round and saw a tall, well-built man advancing across the grass, smoking a cigar. He wore the orthodox white sulu from waist to knee, but above this a white shirt, collar and tie, and a cricketing blazer. There was a decided trace of annoyance in his face as he drew nearer, and for some reason I felt very like a trespasser.

He read my letter of introduction carefully and smiled.

“Come inside,” he said, without the trace of an accent, and we passed through a neat little wicket gate, and followed a path of coral gravel leading to a roomy house of the bungalow pattern.

Ratu Kadavu offered me a chair and flung himself into another.

“When in doubt about an Englishman,” he said, smiling, “offer him a bath or a whisky and soda ; which will you have first ?”

I laughed ; the whole thing was so incongruous. This man was the grandson of Thakabau, and yet——! I looked round the room. The floor was

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covered with spotless matting ; comfortable chairs held out inviting arms on all sides. A red-shaded lamp was suspended from the ceiling, and lit up walls hung with every description of picture and nicknack, from coloured prints of King George to necklaces of shark's teeth and Fijian war clubs. A piano stood in one corner, and in another book shelves supported equally well the latest novel and the oldest of tambuas or whale's teeth, which, if carried in the bad old days, meant the bearer's death.

The whole produced a mingled atmosphere of past and present, barbarism and culture, truly bewildering in its contrasts.

If, as is generally believed, a room is any indication of its owner's character, then Ratu Kadavu offers a psychological study probably unique at the present day.

Although it was now quite dark, a dip was suggested, and I was shown to a roomy, well-appointed bedroom and told that I could wear either a sulu or nothing. I chose the latter, and when I descended the steps on to the green lawn that ran down to the ocean, Ratu Kadavu was waiting for me at the water's edge in like costume. The bath consisted of a semicircular fence of stout stakes driven into the sand as a protection against sharks, a ladder leading down to the water and a spring-board.

Diving into unknown waters in inky darkness is

hardly inviting, and I had almost decided to use the ladder when I caught an "after you" glance from Ratu Kadavu, and launched myself blindly into space.

I misjudged the height of the water and landed flat, but this was not all. When I had swum twice round the pond, demonstrating the latest crawl stroke to the darkness, something cold and alive touched my leg and then nipped me firmly by the foot! Various pictures of sharks, from white to hammer-head, flashed into my mental vision. I distinctly felt teeth crunching into my bones and pictured the water reddening behind me. Then I freed myself with a frantic kick and swam for shore as I am convinced I never swam before.

"There's something in there!" I gasped.

Ratu Kadavu smiled. "Yes," said he, "that's Billy; he's a bit playful sometimes." With that he took a running dive from the spring-board. I heard the splash, and during the pause that followed, strained my eyes into the darkness. The water was disturbed, but nothing showed on its surface; then there was a mighty splashing, and I distinguished Ratu Kadavu struggling with a large turtle. Twice round the pond he sped with the animal clasped to his chest, sometimes on the surface, sometimes beneath it, but always firmly affixed to its back.

I believe some doubt exists as to man's ability to ride a turtle. I can only say that, having re-

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peatedly done it myself, it strikes me as a water-sport exceedingly hard to beat.

By way of a shower-bath after the dip, we stood on the lawn while a procession of natives filed solemnly by, emptying buckets of fresh water over our heads.

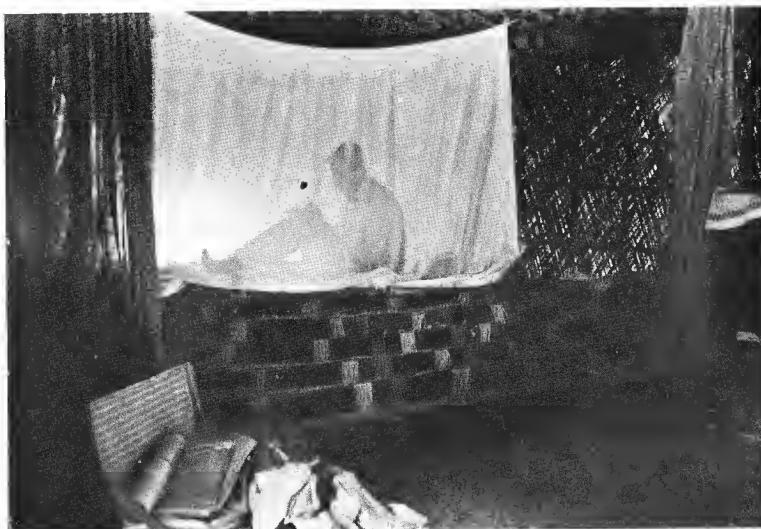
That evening we had Billy for dinner, and I forgave him the nip at my foot. Turtle steaks are an expensive luxury in this country, but in Fiji, where the animals abound, it is a fairly common dish and one of the most delicious, the luscious green meat melting in the mouth like ice-cream. Indeed, the entire meal that evening showed perfection in cooking. Fish, duck, and wild bush-pig rolled in banana leaves and cooked in the ground on heated stones, thus retaining their natural juices, were the main items, accompanied by mealy taro roots (a decided improvement on potatoes), greens, and salads, and followed by wild honey and various stewed and fresh fruits. A cheroot of native tobacco put a finishing touch to a meal that could hardly be bettered.

In the morning the dip was repeated under rather more favourable conditions, and in full view of the welcoming committee, who, now thoroughly reassured, watched us amusedly over the lawn fence.

Suddenly Ratu Kadavu beckoned them, and they filed on to the lawn, crouching low, as etiquette demands when a Fijian approaches his chief.



RATU KADAVU LEVU AT ONE OF HIS "REST-HOUSES"
ON THE ROAD TO SUVA



THE AUTHOR IN HIS BEDROOM ON MBAU

Almost simultaneously with a sharp order from Ratu Kadavu they rushed to the water's edge and dived in. I waited momentarily for them to come to the surface, then timed them by my watch, and it was a minute and a little over a half before they reappeared, far out to sea, shaking the water from their mops of hair and laughing like schoolboys. Then followed the oldest Fijian water-sport. One man treads water and prepares to dodge, while the other turns a complete somersault and brings down a fleshy leg and a horny foot with terrific force on to his adversary's head, or as near it as he can get. The Fijian laugh is like nothing on earth (the nearest approach being the laughing jackass, an Australian bird), and each time a kick was recorded all the players (except the kickee, who for some reason is seldom stunned) gave vent to a demoniac chorus, and turned quick somersaults by way of applause.

Later we watched the swimmers from the deck of an outrigger canoe, while they dived to the ocean's bed and swam along the beautiful submarine gardens of tessellated coral and swaying seaweed, picking up whatever we flung down to them, their sleek, brown bodies, shining with cocoanut oil, resembling nothing more closely than a school of porpoises.

After breakfast we had cricket practice at the nets. It is one of Ratu Kadavu's greatest ambitions to bring a team of Fijian cricketers to England, and his keenness for the game is apparent wherever one

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looks in his town of Mbau. A large temple, built on a mound of coral rock and sandstone, and the home of the old-time human sacrifice, has been converted into a pavilion, and a pitch, clipped and rolled by the natives with all the care of a Lord's ground-man, has been railed off in the centre of the town enclosure. Here, almost every day, Ratu Kadavu coaches members of his team at the nets or tries them out in a practice game, the ground being meanwhile surrounded by an enthusiastic throng of spectators. The team's fielding is wonderfully quick and clean ; in the long field especially, their swiftness in saving boundaries and reaching apparently impossible catches is very marked. Their bowling, too, is dangerously true. One member of the team, a wiry giant of six feet two, can take the ball and bowl down any stump that is indicated.

When the players get thirsty, one of their number climbs a cocoanut palm and throws down some green nuts, their milk and half-formed kernels being extremely refreshing.

Kava, however, is the universal drink of Fiji, and as such is never prepared without fitting ceremony. When, after an hour's hard work at the nets, Ratu Kadavu suggested a refresher of Fiji grog, as he irreverently terms his national beverage, all the ancient rites associated with its brewing were bound to be observed ; and it is by these little ceremonies, these returns to the ways

of their fathers, that one may catch glimpses of the real life of the Fijian people, lying hidden, but not dead, beneath the—as yet—thin veneer of civilisation that is spreading over their land.

Leaving the present-day balls and bats, stumps and pads, we entered Ratu Kadavu's native house by a door four feet high, and plunged into the past. The walls of this dark, lofty room were hung with tapa (the bark of a native tree beaten to the thinness of paper), traced with weird patterns in vegetable dyes. The floor was covered three or four deep with mats, some of which were as finely woven as a panama hat, and on these the natives sat in semicircles, the women well in the background, while I, as the guest of honour, was assigned a seat on a raised dais at the end of the room, and did my best to look worthy of the position.

The yangona, a nubbly root from which the kava is made, was then brought in, cut into fair-sized pieces, and given to three or four of the prettiest girls in the town, who, after washing out their mouths, sat in a circle about the kava bowl and solemnly chewed the root into a conglomerate and juicy mass, their slow and laboured mastication, accompanied with bulging cheeks and expressionless faces, exactly resembling the cud-chewing of a contented cow. When sufficient root had been chewed, it was placed in a kava bowl, and a cocoanut shell or two of water poured over it and squeezed thoroughly with the hands until every

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drop of juice was extracted and mixed with the water. By this time the beverage looked like dirty dish-water, and when white rags were drawn through it by way of straining, one could hardly help speculating on the chances of a stray spoon or fork coming to light at any moment. A brimming cocoanut shell was then poured out and brought to me by a very old man, whose skin was withered and scaly like a snake's.

My name was then announced, and to the accompaniment of clapping hands and guttural grunts—knowing that to pause in the middle of drinking is considered an act of grave courtesy to the host—I managed to drain the shell at a draught, to the huge delight of everyone present.

I had heard a great deal about the effects of kava on those unaccustomed to it, and half an hour after that ceremony I began to experience them for myself.

At first I fancied I was suffering from a bilious attack. A heaviness seemed to have descended upon me and bright pin-pricks of light flashed up before my eyes. Then, quite suddenly, my knees commenced to tremble and bend unexpectedly at crucial moments. We were again at the nets, and I was forced to go and sit under a tree to recover.

Ratu Kadavu was batting, and every now and then looked in my direction, smiling broadly. This struck me as rather unsympathetic, and, as my head was perfectly clear, I struggled to my

feet and stumbled towards the bowling crease. Ratu Kadavu laughed, and with that laugh came to me a full realisation of what was amiss. It annoyed me ; surely I could stand as much of that dish-water as the next man, I thought. At any rate, I would be avenged ! I seized a ball, set my teeth, and prepared to put on plenty of pace. The pace was there, but the ball went outside the net ! Also, my knees collapsed completely, and when I looked up from the grass it was to see, through a perfect constellation of shooting lights, Ratu Kadavu seated in an undignified attitude before the wickets convulsed with uncontrollable laughter.

An hour later I had quite recovered and was waving farewell from the stern of the launch to Ratu Kadavu Levu, Prince of Fiji, and best of sportsmen and good fellows.

XVIII

LIFE ON A COCOANUT PLANTATION

IT was Ratu Kadavu Levu who, with a letter of introduction—that open sesame to Fijian hospitality—made my visit to a copra plantation possible, and I must here take the opportunity of thanking him once more for one of the most interesting days I have ever spent.

In the morning I awoke to the staccato call of the lali (Fijian drum made from a hollowed tree-trunk), and through the mosquito curtains of my mat-strewn bed and the square of open window, looked out on a world of moon-bathed cocoanut palms.

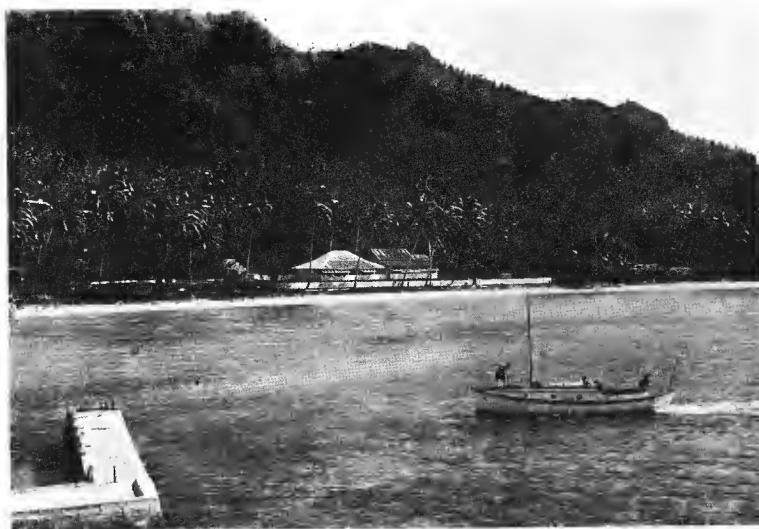
The gentle rustling of their leaves had lulled me to sleep the previous night, and now, at four o'clock in the morning, when by all the laws of a well-regulated island household I should have been on my way to the shower, I was again succumbing to their influence when the boss's voice saved the situation.

“Cup of tea?” it queried cheerily, “never mind anything. Pyjamas? Yes, we live in them mostly.”

The lali's chant had ceased, and as though a



"THE STACCATO CALL OF THE LALI . . ."



A COCOANUT PLANTATION HOMESTEAD

curtain had been rung up on the day's routine, the homestead was already astir. Dogs—five of them, and three fluffy puppies—barked, cocks crew, the tinkle of pot and pan sounded faintly from the coolie "lines," Fijian house-boys wandered hither and thither in their own leisurely way, blue wood smoke curled upward and hovered among the palm tops, someone in the overseer's quarters across the compound "Wondered who was kissing her now" in a light baritone—albeit an unusual conjecture at four o'clock in the morning—while over all this desecration of her peace the moon still spread her silver mantle.

"It's sheer cruelty to animals," observed the boss, sympathetically watching my stifled yawns over his coffee-cup, "but you brought it on yourself by calling for 'a day' on this estate; our day starts at four o'clock in the morning and ends when the labour gets through its task of two hundredweight and two quarters of copra per man. We find we get more and better work done between four o'clock and nine a.m. than the whole of the rest of the day. You've finished, good!—but the shower will still have to wait or you'll miss the start."

Over the sea the sky was just brightening as we mounted and rode towards the lines—a long row of ugly but clean wooden rooms whose doors opened on to another row of ugly but clean kitchens. The labour was streaming out to work, a motley

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gathering of thin-shanked, narrow-chested Indians, whose faces seemed to reflect every shade of human expression. Here were the sullen, the cunning, the murderous, the fawning and the banal, and it struck me then as it often has since what insight, tact, and courage must be necessary to successfully manage such a crew, culled from the dregs of central India. I said as much to the boss.

“There’s only one way,” he answered; “strict impartiality, a fair deal to every man until he turns dog, and then—well, if we had to run things exactly on government ordinance lines we might as well shut up shop. What do I mean by that? I mean the stick. Oh, yes, we lick ‘em; they know that if they do their task set down by a grandmotherly government, everything will go smoothly, and if they don’t they’ll get a licking that—well, isn’t grandmotherly. It’s all they can be made to understand, and the only possible way of handling them. Consideration of the sort employed between white men? Yes, it has been tried.” The boss smiled reminiscently. “I knew a man who personally nursed and doctored a professional malingerer for a month; at the end of that time the coolie was cured—of work. He blandly informed his benefactor that since he had saved his servant’s worthless life it was now at his disposal, but steadfastly declined to do a hand’s tap of work. The long-suffering employer was at last aroused and, before going to bed that night, gave the coolie



AN OVERSEER ON A COCOANUT PLANTATION



A COOLIE AT WORK COPRA GETTING

a bit of his mind—which included a strong hint as to what would happen if another day passed without his turning to. In the morning, the employer's little daughter was found in the compound with her throat cut.

“ No, it's not a particle of use ; the average coolie translates kindness into weakness, and with native cunning takes advantage of it. You see those tickets hanging round each man's neck ? Well, they supply a case in point. One of my overseers has seen fit to trust a coolie. Three times one of his gang has deserted and lived in hiding on the fat of the island—prawns, shell-fish, bread-fruit, bananas and cocoanuts—and three times this overseer has let him off after extracting a promise on the deserter's “ honour ” that the offence would not be repeated. Needless to say, the man has disappeared again, and ten Fijians are now scouring the island for him. These tickets are a kind of passport for the rest in case one of them is grabbed by mistake. I had to pay £16 to the Government Immigration Department for the introduction of that deserter, not to mention extras, and a £5 reward for his capture, and unless he's run to earth and made to work out his indenture, I might as well have thrown the money in the gutter. Gaol's not a particle of good ; they revel in it, come back rolling fat, and advise the others to go there if they want a really soft thing. What are we to do ? We shall have to chain that man to

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his work. It may sound harsh, but I should like you to overseer coolie labour for a few months.

“The islanders ? Oh, they don’t work. The Fijian is an aristocrat, a property owner, and probably worth a good many more shekels than you or I. A few Solomon Islanders get into the collar, and splendid workers they are, but one has to handle them in a very different way from the coolie. They have a sense—and a high sense—of honour ; with them, caustic ridicule takes the place of the stick. If you find a Solomon Islander slacking, you laugh pityingly at his incompetency, say that you had taken him for a man fitted to do a man’s work in the world, but since you find him to be a woman—or a fair imitation of one—why—and he’ll buckle to in a perfect frenzy of offended dignity.

“The islander is a child throughout life, the coolie, for the most part, a snake.”

We were now fairly on the beach road, a sea of inconceivable colours stretching away to the white line of the barrier reef, and dotted with punts awaiting their load of copra on our right, and endless vistas of cocoanut palms planted in uniform rows stretching up the hill-side to our left. Here and there a column of smoke marked the spot where copra cutters were scooping out the kernels of the fallen nuts they had collected, and burning the husks to form potash fertiliser.

Among the palms cattle were grazing on the



AFTER YOUNG COCOANUTS



THE COOLIE "LINES"

short, green grass that carpeted the earth with a natural velvet pile, happily unconscious of their dual service in growing into beef, and keeping down weeds that would otherwise hide the fallen nuts.

An overseer cantered towards us, a splash of vivid white against the restful shade of the cocoanut groves. He had to report that the missing coolie had been run to earth in a cave on the opposite side of the island, and even as we listened to further details, Fijian whoops of triumph floated down to us from the hill-side. We waited, and presently a quaint procession evolved itself from the maze of palm trunks and came to a halt on the beach road. Ten Fijians, armed with sticks and weeding knives, their already copper-coloured visages daubed with charcoal to indicate that they really were terrible persons out for blood, squatted on their hams in a grisly semicircle about an emaciated coolie, who lay huddled on the ground protesting with clasped hands, puckered forehead, and wildly staring eyes, that the boss was his father, mother, brother, and sister, and might do with him as he willed.

To a disinterested spectator the scene was painfully abject, but the boss's not unkindly mouth was set in a firm, straight line.

“Chain him to the flagstaff in the compound,” he said shortly, then, turning to me, “How about some breakfast?”

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There are four meals on a plantation in Fiji : “cup of tea,” “breakfast,” afternoon tea and dinner, the first usually partaken of in pyjamas and the last in evening dress. It was during the third of these that the copra punts crept down the coast, poled by naked, shouting coolies, to be beached opposite the drying yards. Here followed a procession of thin, staggering legs, under impossible-looking loads as the bags were carried ashore, weighed, and emptied on to the “vatas” or drying-tables where, in the course of a few days, the sun transforms the snow-white cocoanut kernel into the soiled, oily and evil-smelling commodity so eagerly sought after at £19 per ton.

There is a margin of profit in copra at £7 per ton, so one may gather the financial status of the present-day planter.

It was all very interesting, and I conscientiously tried to rivet my attention on the main issue, but for some reason—perhaps that I hold the liberty of mankind in too high esteem—my mind persisted in reverting to the vision of an emaciated coolie with puckered brow and frightened eyes, chained to the flagstaff in the homestead compound.

To-day was pay and ration day it appeared, and the last copra sack had hardly been weighed and emptied, when the little store that forms such an important adjunct to every plantation homestead was besieged by chattering, gesticulating coolies.



A PLANTER'S BEDROOM



GOVERNMENT INSPECTION OF COOLIE "LABOUR"

A word from the overseer behind the counter and the clamour subsided into awed silence.

“ Bipat ! ”

A long, lean coolie, with a hare-lip and an air of profound dejection, stepped forward to receive his week's wage, one shilling per day minus four pence per day for rations. I was assured that to the coolie this was dazzling wealth, but I failed to discern a suggestion of it in this man's expression. His rations for the week were then served out with painstaking exactitude by a Fijian assistant :

Rice or Flour, or Rice and Flour	22 oz.
Ghi (butter made of rancid buffaloes'	
milk)	1 oz.
Dal (lentils)	4 oz.
Curry Powder	$\frac{1}{3}$ oz.
Sugar (unrefined)	2 oz.
Salt	1 oz.

the main ingredients of which are imported from India.

The coolie had turned to go when an idea seemed to strike him that had the surprising effect of imbuing his mask-like countenance with some animation. A long altercation ensued with the Fijian assistant, ending in the purchase of several yards of calico with which Indian women swathe themselves. The mystery was expounded to me by the overseer. It appears that the immigration regulations for Fiji allow only one woman to every

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four men, and that competition among the latter is brisk in consequence. The plantation owner sometimes utilises this deficiency as a spur to industry by apportioning the woman to the man who does the biggest task, and our friend Bipat had on this occasion earned a wife for the ensuing week; hence the brightened countenance and the ten yards of calico.

The adage of "*Cherchez la femme*" applies with as much aptness to the joys and sorrows of the coolie in Fiji as to the rest of mankind. In fact, it is safe to say that ten per cent of his crimes are traceable to this world-old incentive to virtue and vice.

Rations had been served and wages paid, when a coolie, who could almost have been termed fat, detached himself from the line that was streaming out into the compound and advanced to the counter with a fawning smile. He pointed to his left foot and danced upon it with every indication of enjoyment, while the overseer regarded him with the set frown peculiar to his kind. The coolie talked and continued to talk, interlarding his remarks with dramatic gestures, until the overseer terminated the interview with the one word "Ghou!"* spat rather than spoken.

"Which being interpreted?" I suggested meekly.

"Means that I have worked a miracle," explained the overseer with becoming modesty. "It was

* Go.



PLANTING A COCOANUT. NOTE—THE NUT SPROUTS LIKE A POTATO

raining yesterday morning, and coolies don't like rain. This man said he had a 'broken foot,' and I cured it in one night. How? By plastering his stomach with mustard."

There was a meke that night on the wide veranda facing the sea. We sprawled at ease in planter's chairs while a tropical moon made day of night, and the Fijian man-hunters celebrated the day's achievement and reviewed their warlike past in song and dance. It is perhaps as well for the success of this kind of entertainment that in watching the Fijian's fierce protestations of valour one is able to lose sight of the fact that he would have some hesitation in saying bo to a goose.

In the morning I left the island with grateful memories of a kindly host, a day well spent—and a mental impression of a wizened coolie chained to a cocoanut palm somewhere on the distant hill-side.

Perhaps they are right, perhaps they are wrong, but whether right or wrong God help the white man when the coloured has his day.

XIX

SHIPPING DAY

AFTER my experience of stock-raising in Canada, it was with a lively curiosity that I accepted an invitation to see how the industry was carried on in Fiji; and now, having compared them thoroughly at every point, commend me to the South Sea variety.

Here we have all the economy of exertion (by the white man) and happy-go-lucky attitude towards the sterner duties of life which supply so much of the fascination of the South Pacific Islands. The charm of this attitude is subtle, but may, perhaps, be defined as a tacit agreement that the world is a pleasant place, and life, on the whole, attractive; far too attractive to be hurried over (again, by the white man). This reservation is made advisedly, as will be seen later.

It is cattle-shipping day on Taviuni, the chief stock-raising island of the group. This is announced for the first time by the melancholy hoot of a ship's siren, and a black trail of smoke against a sky of dazzling blue, as the steamer *Amra* forges down the strait, and anchors a hundred yards from a shingly beach, where Nature has thoughtfully



A COCOANUT PALM BLOWN DOWN BY HURRICANE, SHORED UP BY
VOLCANIC ROCK SUPPORT AND GROWING AFRESH



COCOANUT KERNELS DRYING ON THE VATAS OR DRYING TABLES

supplied a stockyard and "chute" of volcanic rock some forty feet high.

"The question is," observed the boss, "have we any beef?"

There was evidently some possibility, for the head overseer rose abruptly from the table, and blew a whistle on the back veranda.

The stockman sauntered over from his quarters in answer to the summons, and a brief conclave was held resulting in the despatch of thirty "boys" at a jog-trot to "muster the mountain paddock," after which we finished our tea at leisure, lent an attentive ear to the ship's purser, who had come ashore bursting with rumours of war between England and Germany, and finally tore ourselves away to follow the "boys" on horseback.

An hour later we reined in on the summit of one of the vivid green hillocks of the "mountain paddock," lit pipes, and awaited developments. Before us stretched an endless expanse of rolling grass country, dotted here and there with clumps of shade-trees, a range of cloud-capped mountains, and a glimpse of the blue Pacific, a veritable stockman's Mecca, but—one thing puzzled me.

"Where's the water?" I demanded.

"I suppose you mean a stream," said the boss; "there isn't one on this estate."

I looked my astonishment, and he smiled.

"Never heard of pira grass?" he queried. "This is it, as far as you can see; grows five feet

high on Taviuni, and holds water in its stem for months. What do we want with streams ? But you'll see how the cattle look on it."

And I did, for at that moment a faint shouting came to our ears, growing in volume until, in twos and threes, then in mobs of twenties and thirties, cattle commenced to break from the scrub on the mountain-side, and stream down into the open.

Behind them, and on either side, half-naked "boys" ran like the wind, shouting and waving staves like a horde of onrushing dervishes. "Wheeling," "heading off," all the manœuvring necessary to get a mob of two thousand cattle into the two-mile race leading to the stockyards, were done on foot by these fleet, perspiring little brown men with the enthusiasm of a football team, while in the rear an overseer rode at a walk, occasionally blowing signals with a whistle, and carrying an open umbrella !

I glanced at the boss ; he was smoking placidly and watching the proceedings with a gravity that only served to tickle me the more. I laughed, laughed until my sides ached, while he regarded me with a slightly puzzled scrutiny.

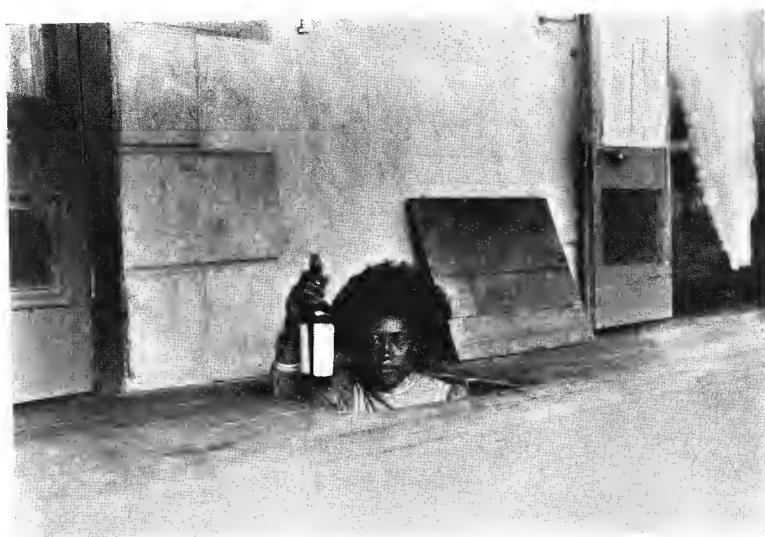
" You seem to find it amusing," he observed.

" Amusing ! " I roared. " It's the funniest thing I ever saw in my life ! "

For a time cattle and men were almost lost to sight in the waving forest of pira grass down on the flat, the herd's passage through it leaving the



CATTLE AND COCOANUTS—A PROSPEROUS COMBINATION



FROM CELLAR COOL

distinct, trampled track that a steam-roller would probably make in a field of wheat. Then a gate was flung open—again by a flying Solomon Islander—and the procession passed on through the cocoanut groves to the stockyards.

I have never seen finer than these last in any part of the world, and I am quite sure none ever took greater effort to build. There was something in the ten-feet-high, four-feet-thick walls of these stockyards, built without mortar of countless lumps of volcanic rock, that brought to mind the labours of the ancient Egyptians over the pyramids. I was not surprised to learn that four hundred Kanakas had been employed on the work—thirty years ago when wages were considerably lower than they are to-day—and that there is no reason to doubt that it will be standing at the end of another hundred.

Apart from these walls, however, the stockyards were uncommonly ingenious and complete, comprising ideas for the better handling and drafting of cattle that I had never seen before.

For upwards of an hour, during which the steamer remained patiently anchored off the chute, drafting operations proceeded apace. Not, I may mention, on account of any exertion on the part of the overseers beyond an occasional lapse into vituperation, but simply because it was merely necessary to sit on the stockyard wall, keep an eye open for a beef animal among those stream-

ing down a narrow race, and when found blow a whistle. The rest was accomplished with three ingeniously-arranged gates, a "guillotine" trap-door worked with rope and lever, and a young army of scurrying Solomon Islanders.

Down on the chute beach all was in readiness for shipping. A stout cable had been passed ashore from the steamer, and made fast to a rock on the beach to form an anchorage for two whale-boats which now awaited their cargo. Another thinner cable attached to the steamer's winch was then brought ashore and held in readiness by a "boy," while (wonder of wonders!) an overseer strolled round the mob of cattle and lassoed one by the horns with a rope noose held on the end of a stick.

A struggle ensued for which the overseer apparently had no heart, for the inevitable Solomon Islanders dashed to the rescue, tied the end of the noose to the ship's cable, and stood back to watch the tug-of-war between the steam winch and the cow, with the approval of those who witness a contest that can but end in their favour. Indeed, there was something pleasantly inevitable about that steam winch and cable. The cow might shake her horns, and bury protesting hoofs in the shingle, bellow and plunge, but her progress was as steady and sure as the passage of time—down the beach, into the lukewarm sea, splashing and straining, up to her knees, her belly, out of her



A FIJIAN BOUNDARY RIDER



“ON THROUGH COCOANUT GROVES . . .”

depth, until she came alongside the nearest whale-boat, where she was made fast to the gunwale.

This was repeated with the possible variation of the noose breaking, and an enraged cow clearing the beach of Solomon Islanders, and even white men, in surprisingly short order, until the two whale-boats had their full complement of five cows a side, when they were towed out to the steamer, and the animals loaded in slings.

By noon the work was completed, and the boss, who had been sitting on a rock smoking and dabbling his feet in the sea, rose with the satisfied air of a man fatigued with honest toil.

"I think we've earned breakfast," he said.

There is a great future before stock-raising in Fiji. A copious rainfall and tropical heat combine to produce a phenomenal growth of grass—in fact cattle were first introduced with the idea of keeping it down—as yet there is no disease; two per cent per annum would cover possible loss, and suitable land can be had at an absurdly small rental.

At present the local demand at £5 per head for three-year-old beef animals exceeds the supply, but the rapid increase on many of the islands has turned the attention of speculators towards canning factories and freezing works, and it is probable that in the near future these new industries will be started in Fiji.

XX

THE CALL OF THE REEF

IT is a comparatively easy thing to get to Fiji ; the difficulty I found was to get out of it again. The Islands have a charm as subtle as it is strong—a charm that no man has as yet quite succeeded in transplanting to paper. It wraps him about in a soft, seductive mantle that at first restrains his movements, and finally holds him fast, a willing captive.

One meets many of these in the Islands, cultured, wealthy men whom one can well imagine strolling down Pall Mall, loitering about the clubs, or riding in the Row, but who now, conquered for all time by this same indefinable charm, prefer to live in an airy bungalow on the shores of the Pacific, dreaming, watching the multifarious life about them, fishing, shooting—and again dreaming.

At first it is hard for the new-comer to understand how such simple things can claim a man's entire life and energy, but that is only because he is not himself attuned to them. Before leaving Fiji, even I—a penniless adventurer, fresh from the strain and stress of a sordid outside world—



IN THE STOCKYARDS



OVERSEER LASSOING CATTLE FOR SHIPMENT

fully understood ; and I still look back on those first months spent among the Islands as a delightful hiatus in my life, that I find myself bound to resume as often as time and circumstance permit.

It was such a man as I have attempted to describe in the foregoing, whom I had the good fortune to claim as my host for three weeks during this my first visit to Fiji. I need say no more than that he is an old Harrovian, and owns an island—or is it a fragment of Paradise dropped by mistake into the South Pacific Ocean ?—in an outlying group called Lau. His house is a model of what the tropical bungalow should be—externally, wide-verandaed, white and rambling, set on a slope of vivid greensward that composes the homestead compound, and divides a glistening coral beach from the cocoanut groves that climb the hill-side behind to the skyline ; internally the acme of comfort and coolness.

“ Do you never want to go ‘ home ’ again ? ” I asked him over an after-luncheon pipe on the veranda.

“ I did once,” he answered, “ and I went. That one trip cured me.”

“ You were disappointed ? ”

“ Terribly. Everything was so utterly different from what I remembered. I think a man who has lived for any length of time in the Islands, must look at things through different eyes from others.

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I could see no particular beauty in the country after this——” he waved his pipe seawards to where the Pacific flashed and sparkled in exquisite tints of blue and green under the bright sunlight. “ Where it was not ordered and artificial, it was drear. Things I used to rave about in my youth left me cold ; and the people—— ! I stayed with my brother, who, by the way, is a parson, and the people I met sickened me. They struck me as affected, mock-modest, hypocritical—altogether over-civilised. They reminded me of the ‘mission boy’ of these parts as compared with the unspoilt native. And the theatres—I did expect something at the theatres—but anything much more unentertaining than the musical comedy of recent times, I have never seen—but then, as I say, I’m prejudiced, insular, anything you like, and ready to admit it so long as it secures me my peace of mind. Would you care for some fish shooting ? ”

“ Fish shooting ? ” I queried wonderingly.

“ Yes, that’s what that tower is for at the end of the landing.”

He brought out a couple of rifles, and calling a few “ boys,” without whom the white man in Fiji seems powerless to do anything, we strolled down the beach, and climbed a trelliswork tower at the end of the wharf about forty feet high. From this elevation the bed of the sea, and anything between it and the surface of the water, shows as clearly as through a clean window pane.



“SWIMMING” CATTLE. THE TUG-OF-WAR BETWEEN COW AND STEAM WINCH



ON THE BARRIER REEF WITH ONE OF “THE FAMILY”

The tide was coming in, and with it two or three semicircular dark patches that I took to be the shadows of clouds until told that they were fish. Even then I could hardly believe my eyes until they were directly beneath us, still drifting shorewards, and I could see them darting hither and thither in a packed mass.

“They’re ose or red mullet,” my host explained; “the women will get swarms of those with the net. Look out for saqa, it’s a large blue fish something like a cod—there, see him?” The words were cut short by the report of his rifle, and the cloud of fish dispersed as though by magic, leaving a saqa and several tiny ose floating on their sides and apparently dead.

“But they’re probably not,” said my host. “It’s just about fifty to one against actually hitting the fish; the concussion stuns them, that’s all. And that’s why our friend Johnnie will now do his marvellous diving feat.” A splash sounded below us, and I looked over the side of the tower to see a sleek, brown body swimming underwater towards the stunned fish. He only just reached them in time, for, as though electrified into life by the touch of his hand, the fish wriggled valiantly as the native held it above his head and whooped in triumph.

Most of the afternoon we spent in this way, potting an occasional fish, and smoking while we waited for another batch to drift shoreward.

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Towards evening, a procession of women, of all ages, filed from the compound down on to the beach, each carrying a segment of a long seine net threaded on bamboos ; and their appearance gave rise to a question I had been wanting to ask for some time.

“ Who are they ? ” I demanded. “ Where do they live, and what do they do ? ”

My host laughed outright.

“ You see the old gentleman in front ? Well, that’s my cook ; the rest are his relations. Everybody is related to everybody else in Fiji—much as in an English village—and when one of them gets a job, the rest cling round him like limpets. I started off on this island by having simply a cook and a ‘ boy ’ ; I wanted to be select. About a week later three more boys arrived in an outrigger canoe, and commenced building burres (native houses) round the compound. I asked the cook who they were, and what the mischief they meant by planting themselves on my land, and he informed me that they were his brothers. He seemed to think this quite sufficient explanation, so I let it go at that. A little later three giggling young women appeared—also by canoe, and I was told that they were the three young men’s respective wives. What could be more natural ? But when two wrinkled old men, and two still more wrinkled old women, put in an appearance, I thought it time to cry a halt. These, it was

explained, were two of the brothers' fathers and mothers-in-law ; the third old couple had gone to Tonga for a trip, but they were expected to return shortly ! Then, of course, they have been ' blessed,' with the result that my compound is more like a native village than anything else ; and still I can't bring myself to turn them out. They keep themselves—and me, wait on me hand and foot, and—well, to tell the truth, I don't know what I should do without them now. They are just like a lot of jolly, well-behaved children, and—I always loved children."

On our way to the launch, in which we were to accompany this devoted band on a fishing excursion out to the barrier reef, we passed a square hole in the ground, about three feet deep by four or five in width, which emitted one of the most poisonous odours I have had the misfortune to inhale. I was making the mental note that, however attractive Island life might be, the sanitary arrangements could bear looking into, when my host stopped, as though beside a bed of violets, and pointed down into the odoriferous darkness.

" Madrai," he explained. " Bread made of banana, crushed and left to ferment under a foot of earth. They're very fond of it in these parts ; seem to look upon it as a kind of superior Stilton—try some ? " But I was already on my way to the launch.

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Even there the horrible odour followed me, or—could it in any way be connected with the two giggling maidens in the bows ? It evidently could, for a few moments later I caught their glistening white teeth closing surreptitiously on a ball of yellow dough, and my ever considerate host had them bundled neck and crop into the dinghy that trailed astern.

Meanwhile, the launch was speeding out to the barrier reef, a ring of coral which, but for a few channels, almost completely surrounds the Lau group. At last we landed, and, with their loose, multicoloured wrappers streaming in their wake, the “sisters, mothers, cousins, and aunts” waded waist-deep over the coral bed, unwinding their net as they went.

We followed more leisurely. The nearest approach to traversing a reef that I can call to mind is picking one’s way over a honeycombed glacier. Without the slightest warning a lump of coral two feet square will give way beneath your feet, plunging you up to the neck—and sometimes over the head—in lukewarm water. There must be some knack in picking out sound footholds, for no such fatality attended my companions, and more than once I scrambled back to comparative safety, amidst the good-natured laughter of “the family.” I had been told to wear old boots, but failed to see their use when, before I had traversed fifty yards of reef, there was not a sole to either

of them. How the natives can travel over the same ground barefoot is only another mystery to add to the many one will meet with in the Islands.

From a little pyramid of coral—one of a number that sprout from the reef like overgrown ant-hills—we watched the operations—the unwinding of the net, the dragging of it over the smoother parts of the reef, and its final joining in a complete circle of bobbing corks. This has hardly been done when “the family” is inside it darting about underwater collecting the spoils. It is a rather startling thing to see a brown-eyed girl of perhaps thirteen suddenly vanish under the water, to reappear perhaps a minute later with a fish in either hand and one between her teeth. This procedure of taking the fish from the meshes, breaking its back with the teeth, and letting it float on or in the water until the entire haul has been dealt with, is necessary out on a reef where there is no shore on which to drag the spoil.

Accompanied by a remarkably well-built boy, whom I took to be one of the “sons,” I succeeded in reaching the outer edge of the reef where the Pacific rollers break with uninterrupted violence. More than once I was nearly swept from my feet, and was forced to grasp the outstretched brown hand that was always ready. Here my companion showed me how to spear fish as they flash past over the coral, but I feel certain he might be showing me still for all the facility I should ever

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acquire at the art. For it is an art—as much as throwing a lariat or boomerang. Personally, I seldom saw a fish ; the boy's arm descended, the spear left his hand, and was retrieved a moment later with the prey impaled on its points. That is all I ever gathered of fish spearing on a barrier reef. It is a different matter in the rock pools near shore, and at night it is quite possible, with a lighted torch in one hand to attract the fish, and a spear in the other, for the novice to secure a very fair bag.

By this time it seemed to me that I must have seen every method of catching fish, but here I was soon shown my mistake. Some genius of "the family" now produced what looked like a bundle of dried leaves, but what on closer investigation proved to be a few strands of the well-known tuva vine. Beckoning me with the glee of a child about to exhibit a new toy, she led the way over the reef to where a ridge of coral formed a rocky, unsubmerged pool, with a huge, water-washed boulder in its midst. Into this she flung the vine, and stood back with much the same air of pride as that shown by a vaudeville manager when introducing a new "turn."

For some time nothing whatever happened, and I was beginning to suspect a practical joke, when a fair-sized fish darted from under the boulder, followed by another and still another. For a while they continued to flash about the pool, as though trying to escape some imaginary foe,



THE FISH-SHOOTING TOWER

then they commenced darting up to the surface of the water with greater and greater daring, until one of them leaped clean out of the pool on to the reef, where it was promptly captured between two nimble, brown hands.

The mystery was made clear by my host, who explained that the tuva vine so poisons any confined water in which it is soaked, that fish are forced to leave it or die.

Even then I had not seen the last of fishing on the reefs of Fiji, for the next morning we waded over the fringing reef near shore, accompanied by a medley of barking, scampering, nondescript dogs that made still further war on fish by pouncing on them in the rocky pools, and shaking them between their teeth as they would a rat.

Before leaving the subject of reefs, I feel bound to answer, to the best of my ability, and on the very best authority, a question which presents itself almost every hour of the day to the vavalagi (stranger) among the Islands, namely : how did they come to be ? There has been endless controversy in scientific circles on this point, and, being anything but a scientific person myself, I may be the better able to convey what I have managed to learn on the subject to the unsophisticated.

Apparently there are three distinct ways in which these islands were evolved. Their present-

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day formation—the atoll, the upheave coral, and the purely volcanic—makes this evident. The first of these, as is well known, is made by the unending labour of a tiny insect known as the coral polyp. The second is formed by the combined efforts, lasting over unknown centuries, of the coral polyp, submarine eruption, wind, sea, and sun. The industrious polyp builds his—and I presume her—coral wall below water; a submarine eruption throws it above the surface, where it is converted into lime by the heat of the sun and action of the water; and finally the waves wash away fragments and pile them back, thus in time forming an island.

The third and last method of formation—the purely volcanic—is by far the most interesting to the layman. We hear of the polyp and its marvellous work, but we never see it, whereas in the matter of a volcano—especially one still in eruption—we feel we have something tangible and very much alive that we can actually watch at its work, so to speak. This is quite possible in the Samoan group of islands. Here one can see an island in all the crudity of its early stages of formation.

From the harbour of Apia, during the daytime, one of the first things to catch the eye is a billowy white cloud of weirdly unnatural shape rising from the western horizon, and hovering motionless like some gigantic stationary balloon. At night this

same cloud takes on a red glow as of an approaching bush fire. This is a thirty-mile-distant glimpse of Mauca Mu, the three-year-old *enfant terrible* of active volcanoes.

To obtain a nearer view of this phenomenon, we take a schooner from Apia, and in a few hours anchor off the iron-bound coast of the island of Savaii. It is impossible to go nearer land at this point, as the lava exuding from the crater of the volcano, eight miles inland, flows red-hot to the sea, and there forms a solid bed only a few feet beneath the surface, not to mention the fact that the sea for a quarter of a mile out is boiling hot, and at half a mile is warm enough to make it distinctly uncomfortable to the hand.

Where the red-hot lava meets the sea one of the most weird and awe-inspiring sights in the world may be witnessed. Dense volumes of steam rise to the heavens, forming clouds that descend in a rain so pregnant with foul gases as to destroy all vegetation for miles round. A number of valuable copra plantations have been destroyed in this way. A series of explosions like miniature volcanoes occur every few minutes ; spouts of boiling water suddenly shoot from the sea, and whirlwinds draw the rising steam into their embrace, moulding it into fantastic columns like the misty pillars of some ethereal palace in the clouds.

Getting into a boat and making a wide detour, we land on the shore. Here we can follow up the

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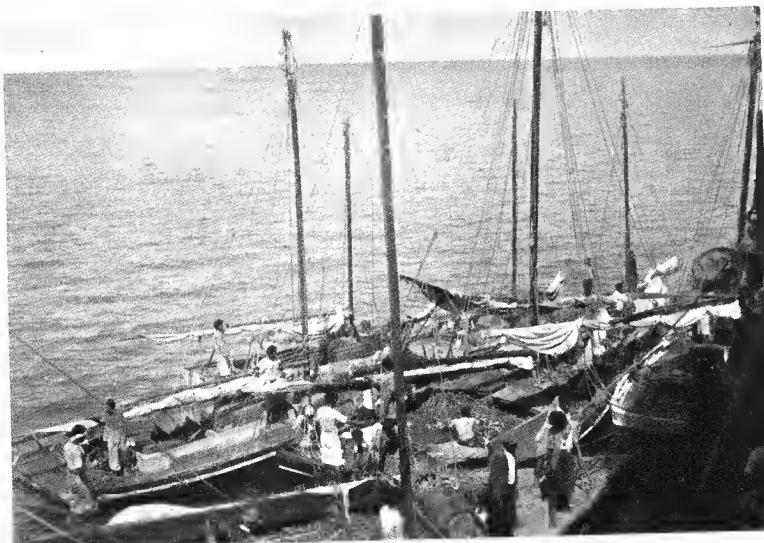
course of the lava-flow running in its subterranean passages beneath the cooled crust, every now and then coming to a vent-hole, and looking down to see the thin lava, like a red river, seething round the caves and crevasses it has formed before finding the main channel again, and flowing on to the sea.

All around us is a billowy, wrinkled, shining sheet of lava, from one to a thousand feet in thickness, according to its proximity to the crater, and covering an area of thirty square miles.

Still we push on, past groves of valuable cocoanut trees, ironwood, and scrub, all levelled with the ground. Presently we come to a house, or what has once been a house, but which is now nothing more than a square pit in the lava bed some ten feet deep, its sides draped with ropy coils of shining black lava.

Two thousand feet above sea-level, we reach the summit of the cone, and peer down through billowy clouds of steam into a seething, bubbling red lake. Every now and then the white-hot lava from even greater depths shoots upwards into the red, flashes brilliantly, and is gone, while dull rumblings that merge into a muffled roar reverberate somewhere in the heart of the mountain, shaking it like a jelly.

Turning and looking seaward down the course of the flow, we may see the long, low lava peninsula that imperceptibly, but irresistibly, pushes further and further out to sea—hour by hour, day by day,



SHIPPING BANANAS



SHARK BAIT

and year by year encroaching further into the ocean's kingdom.

This, then, is the cauldron in which Nature prepares her ingredients for extending the area of dry land on this earth—land which, although black and unlovely now, will one day rival in beauty any of the other gems of the Pacific, and yield for the use of mankind crops of copra, cocoa, bananas, maize, and rubber, every whit as bountiful.

XXI

FIJI TO-DAY

FOR the benefit of those—and I have met many—who have for some time cherished the idea of obtaining employment or land, and making their homes in Fiji, perhaps I may be allowed to indulge in a general, unbiassed résumé of what I saw and learnt at first hand of its present-day commerce, politics, and society.

To begin with, like most tropical countries, it is not at all the place for unskilled white labour. In fact, to be seen carrying one's suit-case from Suva wharf to an hotel—a distance of about two hundred yards—would be considered a short-sighted thing to do. It would lower the dignity of the white man in native eyes. The latter would think far more of you if you let him carry it and then found you couldn't pay at the end of the journey.

This does not mean that the man without capital has no chance in Fiji; on the contrary, if a young man has his health, the strength of mind to resist the temptation to drink, and an average colloquial knowledge of Hindustani, he need be no longer out of employment than it takes the manager of a copra or sugar estate to find him out. It must



SUGAR-CANE CUTTING ON A C.S.R. ESTATE



A TYPICAL ISLAND STORE

not be imagined, however, that the duties of a junior overseer are child's play. On a sugar estate he will have to be up and out at five o'clock in the morning, remain with his gang in the blistering sunlight until five in the evening, and possibly have to make up his books late into the night. Moreover, he must be a man of strength and resource. The Indian coolie is a wily customer to deal with, and the overseer must know—it comes to be almost an instinct in time—whether, when a man refuses to go out into the field, he is really ill or only malingering ; and the women are no whit better. The stories on record of what has happened to overseers who show weakness, or even hesitancy in the handling of coolie labour, would fill a volume, so I will only cite one instance.

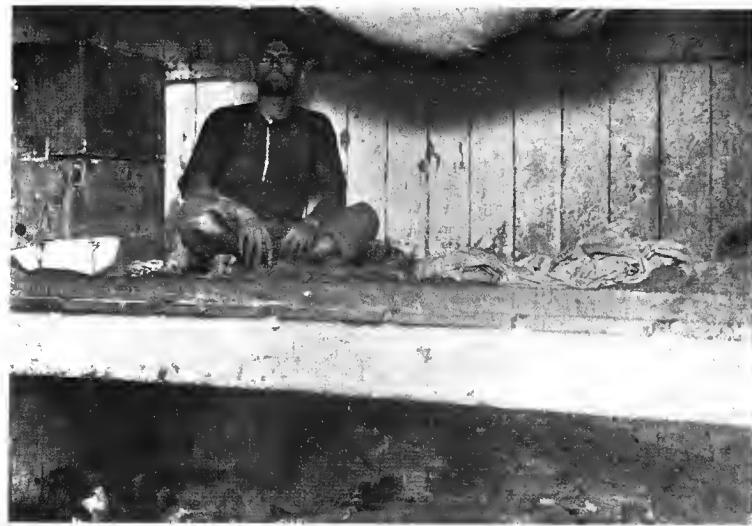
A young overseer, new to the work, was sent out with a gang of coolie women to superintend the work of gathering old sugar-cane butts, and piling them in winrows down the field, where they rot and form fertiliser. Exactly what he did will probably never be known, but the fact remains—indelibly stamped on the memories of the entire staff of the Colonial Sugar Refining Co. at Lautoka—that they set upon him with the hoes, knives, and any other implements they happened to be carrying, rolled him in a ditch of muddy water, and chased him at top speed into headquarters. The incident was not looked upon as particularly amusing ; in fact, it was regarded as a disaster. That youth

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was never allowed to again "work" coolies, and in the end was obliged to leave the country.

Too much severity has precisely the same effect. It is an unpleasant thing to be told at headquarters that So-and-so covered the ground you are now at work upon in half the time. It either disgusts the young overseer or makes him determined to accomplish as much as So-and-so; and there is only one way of doing this—to get more work out of his gang. Perhaps the officials are right; perhaps the men under his charge are taking advantage of his unvarying fairness and consideration. Very well, the next day he makes a point of seeing that every one of them turns out—men and women; if they won't go out he kicks them out—and on that very day three of them are genuinely ill. They never forget an injustice. The young overseer has been known to be found dead in his bed, the mosquito-netting ripped from top to bottom by the slash of the cane knife.

It is a thousand pities that Indian coolie immigration into Fiji is necessary, but without it work would come to a standstill. The Fijian, on the whole, is far too prosperous and independent to work for a shilling a day, or for that matter to work at all, save when the spirit moves him. This usually takes place on the arrival of a cargo steamer, and he buckles to with the glee of a child playing with bricks, except that in his case the "bricks" take the form of corrugated iron roofing,



INTERIOR OF COOLIE'S QUARTERS



THE AUTHOR AND ONE OF HIS FIJIAN HOSTS

bags of copra, sugar, and tanks of molasses. Decked out in the most absurd regalia—skirts of banana leaves, and wreaths of flowers and leaves—for the benefit of the steamer passenger, he will work at unloading for a day, a night, and half the next day continuously, to get a ship off on time; then he rests for a couple of weeks. For this work he receives two shillings a day and four shillings a night.

I was told that it is equally possible for a Fijian to walk thirty miles without food, or to walk eight miles and eat eight meals, and I can well believe it. He is an irresponsible child, and, alas, a child who is dying. Eleven years ago there were 17,000 Indians in Fiji. To-day there are over 40,000. At the present time there are only 86,000 Fijians, and the last census showed a decrease of 7000. These figures speak for themselves.

The question of Indian immigration is one of paramount importance to the future of Fiji. As a labourer the coolie not only serves his purpose, but is absolutely necessary to the progress of the country, but when he has finished his five-years indenture, he very rarely returns to India; and in this he constitutes a menace. He buys a plot of land or runs a store, and inevitably does better than the white man because he can live on so much less. The Indian Government will not hear of the suggestion made by Fiji that the coolie should be made to return to India after his term of indenture,

and so the tide of Indian immigration rolls on unchecked. Unless something can be done to remedy both this and the decline of the Fijian race—mostly through consumption—Fiji will ultimately become an Indian colony with a few wealthy white land-owners.

Having dealt with the possibilities in Fiji for the young man of many attainments and no money, we must now turn to the man with a capital of £700 or over—it is not the slightest use attempting to do anything in Fiji with less. Here four courses are open to him for the investment of his money : a store, sugar planting, banana planting, and stock-raising. The first of these can be dealt with in a few words. With a store he will need an intimate knowledge of native character, and will at once be up against the wealthy merchants, who practically own Suva and have branches throughout the group, and hordes of Indian competitors. If he can manage to compete with these, he will do exceedingly well.

In sugar there are possibilities. The Colonial Sugar Refining Company, who for years have held a monopoly in this industry, and still continue to expand, have of late instituted a new method of dealing with their vast tracts of property throughout the group, namely, instead of working the land themselves, to lease it to outsiders—preferably men who have been in their employ. Of course, this means that the planter is in the hands of a

powerful company, but as this same company can only retain that power by crushing and selling sugar, it gives every inducement to its tenants to supply the raw material.

As regards banana growing, there are the inevitable advantages and set-backs which attend almost any venture on the land. Many men of small capital have done exceedingly well at this industry in the past and will continue to do so in the future, provided the Chinese do not get it entirely into their own hands, and hurricanes are not too frequent in their visitations.

In summing up the possibilities of banana planting in Fiji, it is necessary to consider the matter of land tenure. At present this is in a state of transition. When Fiji was ceded to the British, in characteristic fashion we handed it back to the people, with the result that to-day almost all the land—with the exception of that which was purchased by or given to lucky white men before the occupation, sometimes in consideration of a barrel of rum—still belongs to the Fijian people. This was, of course, done to keep out the land speculator, who would buy up vast tracts of country and allow them to lie idle until he could sell at a substantial profit. The pity of it is, however, that the present mode of procedure has had very much the same effect, for the Fijian either cannot or does not cultivate one tithe of the land he owns, and vast tracts of fertile country are lying idle in consequence.

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At present even leasing has to be arranged with the natives, and a more wearisome business it would be hard to discover. A man files his petition with the Government and in due course—perhaps a month, perhaps two—the natives are approached on the matter and the deal practically settled, when it is discovered that one of the mataqali (tribe) is away on a trip to Tonga or elsewhere, and it is impossible to clinch the bargain without his consent. As a matter of fact, the Fijians are not at all sure whom the land *does* belong to even among themselves. Even when affairs are finally determined with the natives, the man who has applied for the land is not at all sure of getting it, as there are, in all probability, many others on the list of applicants.

There has been some talk recently—as on many former occasions—of the natives handing their land over to the Government intact, and allowing them to lease it for them. At a representative meeting of chiefs, the Fijians agreed to do this, but the Government asked ten per cent on every lease effected, and the chiefs would give only five ; and so the matter has dropped—as it has dropped before and will continue to drop. Malua (by and by) is a stock phrase in Fiji, and in the meantime the country cries out for white settlers.

Stock-raising, the last-mentioned industry in which the man of limited capital can engage, seems to me at the present time by far the most promising.



A LAND CRAB



A HINDU BARBER SHAVING A FIJIAN

The leasehold mode of land tenure suits it excellently, as grazing land can be had very cheaply, and one's capital is in the stock—an always saleable commodity. But I have dealt with this subject at some length elsewhere.

For the man of considerable capital—say £4000 or more—there is always cocoanut planting, and a more enjoyable, remunerative occupation it would be hard to find. It must, however, be borne in mind that one has to wait seven years for a cocoanut palm to bear, and that to obtain coolie labour one must apply to the Government—and perhaps wait a year for it. Malua!

The method of government in Fiji is far too amusing to be omitted here. The legislative assembly that governs Fiji—under Downing Street—consists of the Governor, ten official members selected by him and including two Fijians, and six members elected by ordinary vote. The voting in the assembly always goes ten to six, the ten official members against the six elected, the official members always voting as one man. But if, by any chance, all sixteen members vote together, the Governor has the power of vetoing the whole measure.

In the voting for the municipal electorate, the wealthy store-keeper and land-owner who represent vested interests have the pull, as the Indian merchants vote solidly for them on account of owing them money. On one occasion, that is fresh in the

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mind of everyone in Suva, these Indian merchants were rounded up and driven to the polls like sheep, well primed beforehand to vote for—we will say Weinstein and Jacobson. These instructions had been so impressed upon them that their vocabulary for days consisted of nothing but “ Weinstein and Jacobson.” “ Move up there,” said the clerk in charge of a polling booth, on the great day, to a line of apprehensive Indians. “ D’you hear ? Move up ! ” “ Weinstein and Jacobson,” answered the latter as one man.



CONVICTS IN SUVA, WITH FIJIAN GUARD. IT WILL BE NOTICED THAT ALL THE PRISONERS ARE COOLIES

XXII

HARD TIMES

IF I had stayed in Fiji as long as I wished, I should probably be there to this day, for the Islands exercise a strangely numbing influence on one's sense of responsibility. My cattle ranch and my partner, back on the dreary prairie, seemed a very long way off during these pleasant days ; but at the back of my mind the hard fact always remained that I must return some day to take up the work I had come to dread.

By the time I reached Auckland, New Zealand, the next break in my journey, I had thirty shillings in my pocket, and the majority of this was spent in kicking my heels in lodgings for two weeks while it rained incessantly all day and all night. At the end of that time I was so heartily tired of the outlook, that I determined to reach the sunshine of Australia, which I had heard so much about, if I had to swim.

After two futile attempts, I obtained passage to Sydney as a steward, and spent a week in an Eton jacket that had once been white, and brass buttons, scrubbing floors, drying pyramids of greasy dishes, and sleeping with ten others in a

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“glory hole” where the cockroaches played hide-and-seek behind the coloured prints of actresses and pugilists that lined the walls. After which, I am in a position to say that those who imagine that a steward’s life consists in waiting round unlikely corners for tips are grossly mistaken! Of course, there are stewards and stewards. I can imagine a saloon cabin and table steward having a very fair time of it, but the life of the scullery hand, floor-scrubber, washer-up, or whatever I happened to be during that voyage, is about the most abject I have ever suffered. Even as a deck hand or a cattleman one feels he is his own man; that he is engaged in a man’s work and is at any rate on the same plane as his fellows. But in “stewarding” the sculleryman is a menial, and at the beck and call of everyone. Also, although at sea, he sees considerably less of the blue sky than a clerk in a city office. Only the refreshing fact that I was approaching the destination I had set out to reach restrained me from open rebellion on more than one occasion.

With a heart-felt sigh of relief I saw the “Heads” of Sydney’s world-famed harbour slipping by under a sky of Australian blue, and an hour later found me wandering the streets with five shillings in my pocket, and wondering exactly what I should do next. Under the circumstances, it rather surprises me to recall that here, some fourteen thousand odd miles from my native land, and

practically penniless in a country where I had not a single friend or acquaintance, I felt more at home than I had done since last leaving England. The reason of this I soon discovered to be that Sydney, in October, is surprisingly like a small London, a London minus smoke and rain, minus the motor omnibus, and plus brilliant sunshine and dust, but still—London. On every side I welcomed the similarities with joy ; the narrow and sometimes winding streets—oh, blessed sight after the cut and dried “blocks” of North America, which hold about as much interest for the old-world visitor as a brickyard—the courteous policeman and the genial cockney accent.

It was quite in the nature of things that towards evening I found myself in “Hyde Park,” listening to an excellent band vying with the incessant shriek of countless hidden hordes of crickets ; but when at last the good-natured, pleasure-loving crowds commenced to disperse, I gave my attention to a personal problem that overshadowed all other considerations—how long should I be able to live in Australia on five shillings ? I was not long to be left in doubt.

My meal that evening in a humble but clean restaurant cost me exactly the amount emblazoned on its windows in figures of whitewash—sixpence, and at the price could only be regarded as a miracle. Soup (nondescript but palatable). Roast beef or roast mutton (well cooked and plenty of

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it). Two vegetables. Sweets (of the stodgy English variety). Bread. Butter (real). Tea (the inevitable accompaniment to every meal in Australia). After which I sallied forth in search of equally cheap lodgings, and found them.

For this I have to thank a well-known English author, who caused his hero, *in extremis*, to sleep one night in Sydney's "Domain." I found the place to be an ordinary public park, well grassed and lightly timbered with Moreton Bay fig trees and blue gums; and with a star-spangled sky overhead, bone-dry earth underfoot, and balmy night air wrapping one about, it certainly looked inviting. I was evidently not alone in my appreciation of its advantages, for when I arrived, about half-past nine, others were already stretched at length under the trees in every attitude of reposeful abandon.

I don't think I ever slept better in my life, but in the morning woke early, shivering with cold, and damp from a heavy dew, to find someone close beside me outstretched under several sheets of the *Sidney Evening News*. A column of "Occupations Vacant" was engaging my attention when the man beneath them stirred, and finally sat up, revealing a bloated, old-young face and a waxed moustache. Its owner grunted when I wished him good day, and lay on his side regarding me with a fixed, expressionless stare that was at first embarrassing, then annoying.



A FIJIAN BELLE



A SOUTH SEA BEACH

" I was just having a look at the ' wanteds,' " I remarked, by way of relieving the tension.

" You're welcome to 'em," growled my neighbour in a husky but cultured voice. " They're fakes, every one of them. They don't want men for clerical jobs in Sydney—they want girls ; fat-chested flappers of fifteen for the most part. They live at home and work for seven shillings a week. We don't get a look in. You a stranger here ? "

I answered in the affirmative.

" Poor devil ! " observed my cheerful companion, and lapsed into silence.

" But surely," I protested, " if the city, as you say, is run by girls, there's plenty of room in the country."

" Yes, for those who can stand being eaten alive by mosquitoes, sand-flies, and fleas, and treated like a dog. Besides, don't you know that all those who know anything about Australia crowd into the cities and live on the ' mugs ' who settle up-country —mostly immigrants ? "

" There are drawbacks in every country," I reminded him ; " or at any rate, all the countries I have seen."

But my companion seemed lost in contemplation of his own woes.

" Besides," he broke out with extraordinary vehemence, " how can a man get work, even in the country, with these ? " He extended his feet beyond the newspaper coverlet, and exposed to

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view a pair of ancient brogue shoes slashed almost to ribbons to allow a passage through the “uppers” for the most terrible array of corns I have ever seen.

“I went to a chiropodist in the days when I could afford it,” he said bitterly; “and he told me that I hadn’t got corns at all—they were horns! And he was about right.”

I stared at them aghast.

“Oh, those are nothing,” he continued. “I could work with those; it’s the others—on the soles—that finish me.”

“And how long have you been—like this?”

The man interested me in spite of myself. The history of his downfall was written in his face, but there was something in his rank pessimism that amused me, and in his hopelessness that aroused my sympathy.

“About a year,” he answered.

“And how have you lived during that time?”

He studied me in silence for a moment, then the first hint of a smile that I had seen on his face creased his sallow cheeks.

“I’ll be hanged if I know,” he answered. “If I tried to think back how each meal for the last year has come my way, the strain would kill me outright. But take them all round—with the exception of the anti-British fraternity—Australians are a good-natured lot.”

“Why anti-British?”

“ My dear fellow, don’t ask me. I don’t believe they know themselves. I suppose they must be anti-something, and when their Government happens to be doing precisely what suits them—reverting to socialism—they must vent their spleen on something. A certain section of the Press here thinks it smart to deride British traditions and institutions which alone have kept them intact from their birth, and to them smartness and vulgarity are synonymous. The long and short of it is they’re spoilt with fat and peaceful living, like some of our men at home. They want a war—with Japan for preference—to show them their obligations.”

“ But they pay towards the upkeep of the Imperial Navy, a thing Canada hasn’t done up to the present ; and they’ve started universal training.”

“ Certainly, but I can’t see that that is any reason for being anti-British. I’ve often tried to get a real, solid reason out of them, but I haven’t yet, except an occasional dislike for our taste in socks, or our habit of wearing our trousers turned up.”

I give this conversation, not only because it actually occurred, but because I afterwards found my companion’s remarks to be quite justified. He was sitting now, with the newspaper coverlet flung aside, looking miserably down the slope of grass and trees below us. My sympathy for the man deepened as I looked at him.

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"How about your people?" I suggested suddenly. "You can't go on like this for ever."

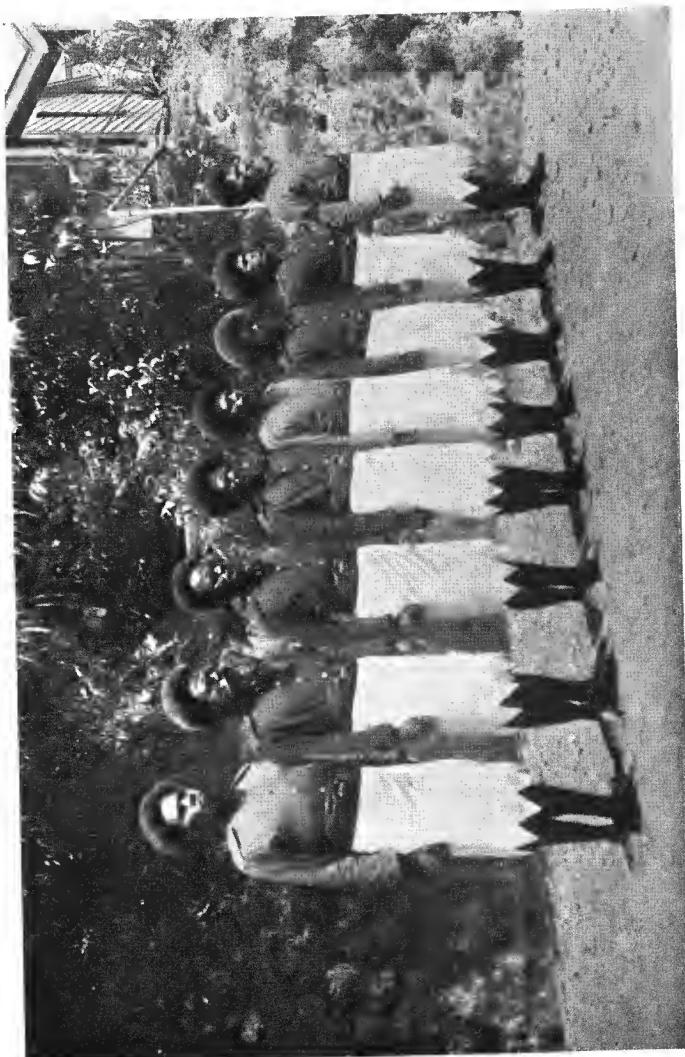
For a moment he tugged fiercely at his waxed moustache, then opened a dilapidated *papier mâché* suit-case which had served him as a pillow, and after ferreting amongst its contents produced a bundle of mounted photographs.

"That's the gov'nor," he said, passing me the portrait of a stern-looking old gentleman with iron-grey hair. "And here's his house. It used to be my home, but sooner than go back and eat humble pie there, I'll go on 'like this' as you call it, to the end."

The photograph he had shown me was of a typical, ivy-covered English mansion—and I guessed the rest. For the life of me I could not help admiring the man. Of all the weird characters I had met in my wanderings, he was certainly the weirdest. I will not go into his life story, which he told me sitting there in the Sydney "Domain," because it may be untrue from beginning to end, in spite of my own private opinion to the contrary; suffice it to say he had been a captain in a well-known regiment at home. This he proved, at any rate to my satisfaction.

Of course, he spoilt himself by asking me to "lend" him money, and equally of course, I refused, but offered him a breakfast provided it did not come to more than sixpence.

"Sixpence!" he almost shouted. "You don't mean to say you pay sixpence for breakfast?"



FIJIAN POLICE. THEIR DIGNITY IS STUPENDOUS

"I should like to know where I can get one for less," I answered.

He scrambled to his feet, and limped up the slope muttering maledictions on his corns. We washed at a drinking-water tap, and then proceeded to a tiny restaurant where the miracle of the day before was surpassed by an excellent breakfast for threepence each. After it, my new-found friend, whom I will hereafter call Yates, for the reason that it was not his name, seemed to brighten a trifle, and finally agreed to accompany me in a search for work—even in the country.

"You'll find me a bad advertisement, though," he warned. "I'm known from end to end of Elizabeth Street, where all the employment agencies are. It's a terrible handicap having to walk as though barefoot on broken shells."

And I found it was, for both of us, yet the continual rebuffs we encountered seemed to have no effect whatever on the case-hardened Yates.

"You will notice," he remarked, between the most fearful oaths directed alternately at his feet and any passer-by who failed to make room for him, "you will notice that in this country the women know how to dress and the men don't. The imagination of the male population never seems to go beyond one colour and material. If you feel inclined to risk a sportive shilling, I'm ready to bet that the next three men we meet will be wearing blue serge. Also, you will notice that there are

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no girls—only children and women. There's nothing in between in this country. Confound it ! Can *anybody* in Sydney walk straight ? ” This to some hapless pedestrian who momentarily obstructed his erratic progress.

By this time I was growing a trifle weary of our continued ill luck, and as we approached an employment agency managed by a certain well-known Sydney newspaper, where Yates had told me we were “ bound to strike something,” I felt it incumbent upon me to offer some advice a few yards from the doorway.

“ Straighten up,” I said severely. “ Even if it hurts abominably it will only be a matter of seconds before you get to a chair. For Heaven’s sake try to *look* as if you could do something, if only for a few moments.”

I must say he did his best, but at that it was a sorry exhibition, and I heaved a sigh of relief when he found a chair and sank into it with a muttered imprecation.

There were many others present, sitting on benches round the walls of a small, bare room ; and a young lady with a perfunctory manner, no doubt engendered by constant contact with “ out-of-works,” made a hasty circuit of the group, demanding if any of us were “ stackers.” Was I a “ stacker ” ? Perhaps—at any rate I risked it, and to Yates’ dismay answered in the affirmative ; but the rapid young lady had already passed



THE LEANING PALM



THE YOUNG IDEA

on and my neighbour got the job — whatever it was.

This continued with monotonous frequency until the luncheon hour, when we found ourselves once more on the pavement without any appreciable improvement in our outlook. "Dinner" cost us—or rather me—sixpence each, after which we returned refreshed to the fray.

XXIII

HARD TIMES CONTINUE—AND END

TOWARDS evening we encountered an encouraging person who spoke enthusiastically of a place called Emu Plains. He told us he had just returned from there after completing a "wood-cutting" contract, and that there was plenty of work at seven shillings a day if we could only get there.

"But they fight shy of getting men from the Sydney employment agents," he told us. "All they care about is getting their commission, and send out any bar loafer who happens along. You go to Emu Plains, and you'll get all the 'wood-cutting' you want for the next year."

Our informant looked horribly prosperous with his rakish panama and cigar. On the whole we determined that "wood-cutting" appeared promising.

"Can you use an axe?" I asked Yates.

"I can use anything but my feet," he answered, tugging feverishly at his moustache.

"But how are you going to get there?"

"Train, I suppose; it's only two and fourpence from Sydney."



A FUJIAN SUBSTITUTE FOR THE PLUM TOP

“ And the two and fourpence ? ” I suggested mildly.

“ Haven’t you got it ? ”

“ Yes, for myself ; I was wondering how *you* will get there.”

This problem had evidently never occurred to him. He even looked hurt at my mentioning it, and for the life of me I could not help laughing at his crestfallen countenance ; it was so typical of the hardened “ cadger.” The more I did for him the more, I could see, he would expect ; and with my finances at their present level, I felt that a threepenny breakfast and a sixpenny “ dinner ” must be the limit of my philanthropy.

In his efforts to grapple with the situation, I began to fear that my friend would tug his moustache out by the roots.

“ I’ll pay you out of my first day’s wages, I swear I will,” he pleaded.

“ But I haven’t the money,” I protested.

“ You have a watch.”

It was too true. I had no answer, and we proceeded to the nearest pawnbroker, where I discovered that an English lever will extract ten shillings from adamant.

With this wealth in hand, Yates pointed out the many disadvantages of sleeping in the “ Domain ” when it was possible to secure a real bed and a roof over our heads for threepence the night. It certainly sounded moderate, and this accounted for

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my first-hand acquaintance with a Sydney “doss house.”

I have often heard Australians deplore the poverty and squalor of London slums, and rejoice that such a state of affairs can never exist in their own fair land, but this only shows that they have explored London more thoroughly than their own cities. Personally, after sampling the accommodation for the poor in both countries, from the viewpoint of hygiene, comfort and cheapness, I should prefer the London tenement dwelling.

About ten o'clock that evening, after another miraculous meal, and the unheard-of luxury of a whisky and soda, which Yates absorbed like the sands of a drought-stricken desert, we entered a dark, narrow doorway, lit by a flickering gas jet, paid sixpence to an unhealthy-looking gentleman in a ticket office, and climbed, in darkness, up a flight of rickety stairs.

At the top we found ourselves in a narrow corridor separating two rows of cubicles, each containing four beds and a pail. The place smelt abominably, and I was seriously considering the advisability of forfeiting my sixpence, and returning to the “Domain,” when heavy footfalls sounded on the stairs, and a procession of men, of all ages and descriptions, commenced to flow down the corridor, and take possession of the rooms—with, apparently, as much noise as possible. The two who shared our cubicle were studies in themselves,

HARD TIMES CONTINUE—AND END 225

and I lay in bed alternately trying to sleep and to solve a problem which always interests me, namely, what these denizens of a city's underworld did for a living.

In his present state—that of nature, which, by the way, appeared to be the prevailing fashion in night attire in our particular “doss house”—the corpulent elderly gentleman with a bald head, sitting on the edge of the bed opposite mine, might easily be a city magnate of importance; whereas, in the clothes he had just removed he had looked what he was, a street post card seller. He had made five shillings that day, or so I gathered from the altercation that took place between him and his partner, a wizened Italian who must have strayed from the fold of the Sydney fish shops.

To me that night was a nightmare of naked men in various stages of sobriety, who wandered at will, smoking, chatting, laughing, and quarrelling as though in a club-room rather than a place intended for repose. And Yates slept through it all—or so I thought, until a gigantic, hairy man, with an unmistakable though slightly thickened accent, paid us a fourth visit with the same query: “Hae ye got a match?” Then it was that my friend sat upright in bed, and tugged at his moustache with a hand that trembled violently.

“We have not got a match,” he stated with intense deliberation; “and if we had, we should not give it you. Now get out!”

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To my intense surprise, instead of the outburst I had fully expected, the giant seated himself on the edge of Yates' bed, and endeavoured to soothe him with honeyed words.

"Ah, then ye're ma freend. A mon with spunk is what I like to see. Ye're the first *mon* I've struck the nicht. Now our venerable freend yonder"—he indicated the corpulent city magnate, disguised as a post card seller, who shrivelled visibly—"he does'na like me, mind ye, and I canna say I'm taken with him, but he'll gie me a match ; you see if he does'na gie me a match."

The post card seller was fumbling among his clothes under the pillow, and protesting valiantly that our visitor was labouring under a misapprehension ; that he (the post card seller) liked him immensely, and that nothing pleased him more than supplying him with matches at any hour of the day or night, when Yates flung back his bed-clothes with an oath and, with several more as his feet touched the ground, advanced limping on the enemy.

"If you don't get out of here," he hissed with terrifying venom and seven corns on either foot, "I'll kick you out ! Which is it to be ? "

The two naked men, facing one another in that dimly-lit room, formed a picture that I can still summon up at will ; and it is characteristic of the bully that nothing whatever happened. With several assurances that Yates was his "freend"

for life, our nocturnal visitor drifted into the corridor, and Yates dragged his bed across the doorway. I felt a twinge of remorse that I had ever asked my friend to “try to *look* as if he could do something.” He had not only looked as though he could do something, but had actually done it.

The night passed somehow, and in the morning I left my first and last “doss house” with the determination that the “Domain” was infinitely preferable.

Our journey to Emu Plains the next morning was uneventful, but fraught with hope. The country round about Sydney is not attractive, and it became less so as we approached our destination; but what cared we for scenery, with work at seven shillings a day in sight?

We alighted at Emu Plains station, and even as we crossed to the local “pub,” a horrible doubt assailed me. The surrounding country was as bald as an egg, reminding me forcibly of the Canadian prairie. What if—but the thought was unspeakable.

The proprietor of the hostelry welcomed us with open arms until he learnt that we were in search of work rather than liquid refreshment; and finally lost all interest in us and our enterprise except to inform us that he had been in the locality five years, and all the wood-cutting he had seen during that time he could place in his left eye without causing him any great inconvenience.

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As he pertinently put it: "What is 'wood-cutting'? And if there is such a thing, why come to a part of the country where there isn't any wood?"

"Well, we can have a beer," Yates suggested. And I think that remark was all that saved me from tears. As it was, I sank on to a bench and laughed.

"We're *supposed* to laugh," I told my friend. "The man with the panama and cigar thought it funny, and it's a pity to disappoint anybody if you can help it."

"Certainly," he agreed. "But what about this beer?"

We spent the hours remaining before the next train back to Sydney by sitting in a fold of those abominable plains, I, smoking and devising imaginary tortures for men with panamas and cigars, and Yates paring his "horns."

It is hard to imagine what entertainment anyone can extract from giving false information to strangers, with the only possible motive of sending them on a wild-goose chase, but that such people exist I have taken the opportunity of showing here as a warning to others.

It is an old saw that when things are at their worst they are bound to improve, and, unlike a number of others, it is occasionally true. At any rate, on our arrival in Sydney the outlook could hardly have been less favourable; yet two hours

HARD TIMES CONTINUE—AND END 229

later I had made ten guineas, and was more or less in an established position. Such are the freaks of fickle fortune.

Ever since my first arrival I had left my one article of luggage—a dilapidated green canvas suit-case—in the cloak-room at the wharf, and, on going with the limpet-like, but ever-welcome Yates to fetch it, I showed him its contents consisting of a few articles of clothing, and a bundle of some hundred and fifty photographs, taken during my wanderings, and before my camera had gone the way of all my belongings. These seemed to interest my friend considerably. He went through them slowly, and in silence from beginning to end, then replaced them in their corner and tugged thoughtfully at his moustache.

“ Those ought to be worth money,” he said.
“ Would you sell them ? ”

“ Sell them ! ” I cried. “ I’d sell my shirt if I could spare it.”

“ I wish I had a fiver to invest,” he sighed.

“ Do you mean to say they’re worth fivepence ? ”

His hand shook as he raised it again to his moustache—a sure indication that he sighted refreshment in the near distance.

His opinion of their worth in coin of the realm, and where I was most likely to get it, was expressed in six words, and in as many minutes I was striding up George Street with Yates cursing and limping in my wake.

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Without mentioning the name of the periodical that gave me a hearing, I may say it was one of the leading weeklies of Australia, and the editor sat in his revolving chair sorting my photographs like a pack of cards, choosing here, rejecting there, while I stood by trying not to look as though my next meal depended on his decision. The Canadian pictures especially seemed to take his fancy, and in the end he took twenty at ten shillings and six-pence apiece, asking me to supply letterpress for each.

After a rather awkward pause, I informed him that I should be only too happy to do what he asked, provided I had something to live on in the meantime ; whereupon he smiled understandingly, gave me a cheque for the photographs on the spot, and I left his office walking on air.

Yates was waiting for me on the pavement, literally watering at the mouth. I am convinced he was far more pleased at my success than if he had secured work himself—but this *en passant*. We celebrated the event in a manner which met with his entire approval, and took cheap lodgings in Darlinghurst.

Such was the beginning of one of the most enjoyable billets I have had the fortune to stumble into. Each morning I went out to one of the beautiful bays that nestle in the arms of Sydney Harbour, and spent the day in one of the many swimming-baths built out into the sea as a pro-



SIRENS OF THE SURF AT MANLY

tection against sharks, where, dressed in a bathing-suit, I lay in the sun alternately writing and swimming. Yates guarded me as something exceeding precious.

“Spin it out,” he would urge. “This is only the beginning. For Heaven’s sake spin it out, man! Where one word would do, use six—at thirty shillings a thousand.”

His counsel was inspiring, and, as it afterwards turned out, his prophecy correct. The photograph letterpress led to a series of articles, and the articles in turn to assignments. It was whilst engaged on one of these that I witnessed an Australian surf carnival, and as a spectacle which is probably unique, I can hardly pass it by without mention.

Manly beach, where it took place, is about twenty minutes from Sydney by ferry, and is one of the finest I have seen—pure, hard sand, and anything from a mile to a mile and a half in length. Every day of the year there are bathers in the surf, diving through the huge green billows that roll in from the open sea, or lying about the sands sunning themselves; but at carnival time the place is *en fête*, with bands, processions, flags, and joyous crowds during the day, and Japanese lanterns and more bands and joyous crowds at night. People wander the streets in anything from sedate evening dress to running “shorts” and kimonos, and the absence of restraint—at any time noticeable in Australia—becomes infectious.

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The carnival itself mainly consists of the usual aquatic sports, and life-saving exhibitions by the various clubs which abound in and about Sydney ; but there are some items in the programme which strike the visitor as distinctly novel. For instance, a water pageant representing the landing of Captain Cook in Australia, and Venus rising from the sea—and borne the entire length of the beach in a gigantic conch shell on wheels.

At a particular carnival I witnessed, there was a lifelike representation of the invasion of Australia by the Japanese. A large raft was moored to a buoy out at sea, and this carried the invaders who, on landing, and after a sanguinary conflict, were put to rout by an army of boy scouts. The spectacle was both well staged and well dressed, and I could not help wondering how it appealed to the Japanese visitors I saw there, especially when they are used to having the " *Mikado* " banned for their benefit in England.

Perhaps the most interesting item was the exhibition of " breaker-shooting " by the members of a club who have made it a speciality. This is such a fascinating sport that I wonder it has not come into vogue in England, where, except for the lower temperature of the water, conditions are exactly similar. Of course, neither country can afford anything to equal Wakiki beach at Honolulu for the sport, on account of the latter possessing a coral reef some distance from shore which, instead

of breaking the incoming wave, merely sends it shoreward in a slow, continuous swell that suits the surf-rider to perfection. But Manly beach is well enough, and I see no reason why Brighton beach should not be equally suitable.

The surfer swims out to a spot where the waves are just on the inward curl—the judgment used in selecting this spot is half the battle. Here he treads the water and waits for a roller that by its volume particularly takes his fancy, rises with it almost to the crest, and then plunges head foremost down its emerald-green slope. If he “manages” his wave well, or rather if he allows the wave to manage him well by throwing his weight as far forward as possible, and folding his arms about his head in such a way as to give the greatest possible surface for the water to take hold of, he will find himself being carried swiftly, and ever swifter down its endless slope, headlong for shore. Otherwise—he will find himself left lamely behind, treading water and enviously watching the adepts spinning through the water like human torpedoes, until washed high and dry on the sand.

It is far more difficult than it looks, and it took me over three weeks to master the art, but the time was well spent. “Shooting the breakers” gets into the blood like ski-ing or tobogganing.

My instructions for the afternoon were to “get pictures of the surf-riding,” and I did, to the best of my ability; first wading into the sea waist-deep

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and "snapping" as I could between the breakers, then perched on the shoulders of the ubiquitous and blaspheming Yates, but both methods resulted in the camera getting badly splashed.

For two months I managed to "spin it out" as my friend would have said, and could possibly be doing so still if the more substantial state of my finances, and the ever present wander-lust had not carried me on to Queensland.

I had heard so much about this State as being the most promising in the Commonwealth, that I decided to investigate its resources for myself, and I may say I have never ceased to be thankful that I did.

Yates? He drifted out of my life as he had drifted into it. One gets hardened to making chance friends and losing them again in the course of world-wanderings.



"SHOOTING THE BREAKERS" AT MANLY

XXIV

QUEENSLAND

IN entering upon these, the final stages in my wanderings as far as the reader is concerned, and dealing with a country like Queensland, 670,500 square miles in extent, it is obviously impossible to deal with its multifarious and, as I think, unequalled resources.

I went to Queensland, as many another has done, to spy out the land. With experience gained elsewhere to decide what particular opportunities—if any—it offered to me personally. This, of course, narrows the outlook, but at the same time focuses it on the one objective, namely, to discover if and where a tenderfoot of few attainments and strictly limited capital may invest his precious hoard to bring in a safe and reasonable return.

The mineral resources of Queensland have hardly been more than scratched—but I knew nothing of mining, except that it is more or less of a gamble anywhere.

There is pearlning round the Gulf of Carpentaria, a romantic calling that has lured many a man to fortune—and failure; and there is stock-raising on a large scale—sheep, cattle and horses—but

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after the Canadian prairie I told myself I had finished with stock. It is not a pleasant thing to have one's worldly wealth on four legs that may give way at any moment, leaving a carcass worth less than nothing. Crops may fail, but land cannot die. I was determined that my investment should be in land of some sort.

There were dairying and mixed farming, too, especially on the celebrated Darling Downs, but here again one is at the mercy of the three curses of Australia : drought, red-water fever (a cattle disease), and the labour problem, of which the worst is undoubtedly the last. To touch upon it here would be to open up a vista of claim and counter-claim, of which the Australian professional politician is vainly seeking the end at the present time, but the general situation can be summed up in a few words.

. . . The desires and aspirations of the present-day Australian appear to be a blend of the following : A white Australia (meaning the exclusion of the coloured races). An Australian nation, individual and entirely separate from the British Empire. Security from invasion while this nation is in the course of construction. Prices of food-stuffs, etc., lower than those of any other country. Wages, for all classes of labour, higher than those of any other country. Capitalists to pay these wages, or to share profits with their employees *and pay losses themselves.*

. . . Exactly how it is all to be done, his politicians are handsomely paid to discover, while in the meantime strikes and rumours of strikes convulse the country. Fortunately, Australia is young enough, sturdy enough, and sufficiently rich in natural resources to recover quickly from these onslaughts on its prosperity, and especially so in the case of Queensland, the most promising State in the Commonwealth ; but they give the would-be settler pause before the investment of his little all.

This, then, was my position : I liked the country, the climate, and the people (individually) immensely ; it remained for me to discover how I could make the best living at the smallest risk to the capital at my disposal, and at last, after a rigorous process of elimination, I decided on fruit-growing. Drought—as it has been known in the interior of Queensland—is unknown near the coast ; disease remarkably rare, and the labour problem—I would work doubly hard myself and so save the wages of at least one man.

The possibilities of the thing took hold of me. I was filled with the enthusiasm of a wanderer who at last comes upon the corner of the world he recognises as his own, and, from that moment, I was obsessed with the desire to dispose of my Canadian interests at the first opportunity and settle there.

I must pass rapidly over the following six months, during which I sailed for England, spent

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three restless days in London, and continued on my way hot-foot for Canada. All this was effected on the proceeds of my newspaper work in Sydney, which demonstrates the possibilities in modern travel, and the wisdom of Yates' exhortation to "spin it out."

I found the ranch in little better circumstances than when I had left it, owing to another of those severe winters that play such havoc amongst stock on the prairie. What a dreary, dead-alive place it seemed after the beauty spots of the world I had lately visited. I knew now, if never before, that I could never remain long on the prairie again. And yet there are those who cannot bring themselves to leave it ! There is no accounting for taste, but to me their choice savours of the bird that has grown accustomed to its cage.

Later in the spring an embargo was placed on Argentine meat owing to disease, and this had the effect of raising the price of Canadian beef to such a figure that we were able to sell our depleted bunch at nearly double the figure it would have realised under ordinary circumstances. Only another proof that what spells ruin to one may be the salvation of another.

Again I must cover a distance of some fifteen thousand odd miles in a few words ; I returned to Queensland, but this time as a prosaic and more or less respectable steamer passenger, with my worldly wealth not in a grain sack on my back as of yore,



SHOREWARD !



STRAWBERRIES ! "RUSSIA" IS TO BE SEEN IN NATIONAL COSTUME

but represented in a scrap of paper in my breast pocket.

A few miles south of Brisbane I found the fruit farm of my dreams—according to the trend of my dreams at that time. It comprised seventy acres in all: forty-eight of uncleared “bush” land, ready to be brought under cultivation as time and opportunity allowed; five of passion fruit—a vine bearing an egg-shaped fruit not unlike a plum in appearance but unique in flavour; two of paw paw trees—a leafy, miniature palm which when fully grown stands about seven feet high, and bears fruit the size and shape of a musk melon, but again unique in flavour and much sought after on account of its medicinal qualities; five of young banana plants; five of newly-planted strawberries, and five of fallow land. And the house! It was a veritable mansion compared with my dwelling in Canada. Wide-verandaed, set on posts twelve feet high capped with inverted iron plates to check the inroads of the white ant—a pest that can reduce a solid wooden structure to crumbling comb in a few years—it contained eight large, bright rooms, and faced the sea. What more could heart desire?

But what particularly pleased me about the place was its newness. Everything on the farm was “only just coming into bearing,” as its owner pointed out. The great mistake the majority of “new chums”—the Australian equivalent of “tenderfoot”—made was to buy old-established

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farms which were probably on their last legs, and would require a big outlay in fertiliser to bring them up to scratch.

Did the owner want to sell ? No, he did not—that was, unless he got his price. He would sell anything—at his price. And what was his price ? Twelve hundred pounds.

He evidently expected me to collapse on the spot ; instead of which he nearly did so himself when I closed with him then and there.. I had nothing like twelve hundred pounds, but I knew that the Australian banks are accommodating—provided they draw their eight per cent and hold a fair security. The house alone I knew to be worth, at least, three hundred pounds, and as for the standing crops and the land itself—the place was mine !

The first and greatest difficulty was to secure labour, but in this respect I was exceedingly fortunate. Nearly every week immigrant ships are arriving at Brisbane, and by going to the Government dépôt I succeeded, after a deal of haggling with the official who acted as interpreter, in securing a Russian couple who could not speak a word of English. This I looked upon as a blessing rather than a defect, for I knew something, and had heard more, of the independence and laziness of the average Australian farm hand, who has a knack of trying to teach his employer how things should be done, which, even if perfectly possible, is hardly conducive to amicable relations between employer

and employee. A man usually prefers to make—or lose—his own money in his own way.

I found my choice to be a wise one, for, from the hour my Russians and I took possession of the house, and commenced to work the farm, I never found them to be anything but willing, good-natured and loyal, although at first our conversation was necessarily restricted to pantomime.

The man stood six feet four in his socks, and had the sheer muscular strength of any two ordinary individuals with whom I have come into contact, yet was as gentle as a woman—should be. Indeed, his wife, who made up in girth what she lacked in stature, most decidedly had the whip hand.

At that particular time—the Queensland spring—no crops were bearing, and all that was necessary was to keep the place “clean,” which, by herculean endeavour we succeeded in doing in spite of the weeds which seemed to spring up in the night by magic.

My first visitor was a little wizened man with a straggling grey beard, who owned the farm adjoining mine, where he grew nothing but pineapples. I proffered him beer and a “settler’s” chair, both of which he accepted readily enough.

“What are you going to do with all those strawberries?” he asked me suddenly, breaking in on a remark of mine that I had thought particularly interesting.

“Sell them, I hope,” I replied.

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“Yes, but how are you going to pick them?”

“To tell the truth I haven’t thought about it—yet,” I said. “In—in the usual way I suppose.”

“And do you think you and your man’ll be able to handle that lot?”

“That was the idea.”

He looked at me incredulously for a moment, then sniffed audibly and shifted his gaze to the sea.

“It’ll take you two and four or five others to handle ‘em,” he said, “and I was wondering where you’d get them from, that’s all.”

“But——”

“That’s the worst of small crops,” he continued inexorably. “They may pay the man with a wife and family—the bigger the family the better—but they don’t pay the wages of hired help. You know the way they have to be packed?”

I admitted that I did not, and the sniff was repeated.

“Well, they have to be packed in a single layer in a cardboard box, four or five in a row with leaves between each.”

“But why——”

A shrug of the shoulders cut short my query.

“Because it’s the fashion in Brisbane. Sometimes after rain you have to wash ‘em, or clean ‘em with a tooth-brush; it’s all the way they look that sells ‘em. Then sometimes they all come on at once, and you can’t get them off the plants before they

rot, unless you send them to the jam factory, and it's all you can do to get a contract with a jam factory these days. I used to grow small crops before I knew about them—they're the devil."

I was beginning to think so too.

"Ah, well," I sighed, "thank goodness I don't have to depend on the strawberries alone; the bananas will be bearing by the autumn."

My guest was still staring seaward, and a far-away look came into his eyes.

"Yes," he murmured irrelevantly, "that's the worst of these 'made-to-sell' farms."

For a moment I was not altogether sure of his meaning, but when it dawned on me, I felt my gorge rising. To accept a neighbour's hospitality, even if only a glass of beer and a settler's chair, and then to abuse his home to his face, struck me as a trifle blatant.

"You mean this farm was 'made-to-sell' ?" I queried as evenly as my state of mind permitted.

"Why, certainly," he agreed, almost cheerfully; "made to sell to the 'new chum' who don't know anything about fruit. It's too bad; too damn bad I say. But there you are—you've bought it and—"

"You mean, I suppose, that I ought to have bought yours ?" I suggested with some asperity.

My guest regarded me fixedly for a moment,

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then, " My farm isn't for sale," he said. " I don't go in for small crops."

" Neither do I, solely," I protested desperately. " As I say, there are the bananas and——"

The man's sniff was rapidly getting on my nerves.

" I don't suppose you'll believe me," he said with exasperating coolness, " when I tell you those bananas won't bear."

" In Heaven's name why ? "

" They're Cavendish, and Cavendish won't grow in this soil and climate even if they're planted right, which those weren't—but *they look pretty*."

" And I suppose the paw paws won't bear either," I prompted.

" Some of 'em will. I suppose you know there's the male and female paw paw. You can't tell which is which till they throw out shoots. I had a look at yours a week before you bought, and eighty per cent are males."

" Well, what about it ? "

" The males don't bear."

I never felt more like kicking a man in my life.

" Would you mind telling me what does bear—and pay—in the way of Queensland fruits ? " I demanded.

" Why, certainly, pineapples. You can't be sure of anything but pineapples."

" You mean they pay because you happen to grow nothing else yourself ? "

" No, I grow them because nothing else pays."

I could not help laughing outright, and filling my visitor's glass afresh. A more thoroughly depressing person I had never met. I tried to regard him as one of those chronic pessimists whose one desire in life is to tell other people what a howling mess they have made of things. I told myself that if I were disheartened by his opinions—and possibly erroneous opinions—I should be a man of straw. But alas, everything he had said proved only too true, and in the end I came to see in him a man older and wiser than myself, who had nothing but kindly intentions in warning me, in his own peculiar way, of breakers ahead. I perceived that where I had merely "thinned things down," as far as earning a living was concerned, to fruit-growing in Queensland, he had thinned down fruit-growing in Queensland to the best-paying and surest crop.

The strawberries proved a never-ending nightmare. My Russian and I were bent double over the beds or crawling on hands and knees from back weariness, from five a.m. to five p.m. and it may be recorded that such exercise directly after meals is not calculated to aid digestion. From six p.m. to sometimes eleven o'clock at night, we were seated in the packing room placing the fruit in their absurd cardboard boxes.

To keep pace with the crop I was obliged to hire four local youths at one pound per week each, who ate half as many strawberries as they picked, and

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thought it the acme of humour to surreptitiously fling others at my Russian—until he caught one up by the scruff of his miserable neck and shook him like a rag.

When packing was over at night, I made up the books, but no amount of juggling with figures altered the stern fact that I was losing on an average twenty-five shillings a week, and working like a horse to do it. If only other crops were bearing there might have been a hope, but they were not. True, the banana plants had begun to show miniature bunches. The first I saw filled me with an unholy glee, and I at once dragged my depressing neighbour to the spot and triumphantly showed him his mistake; but he only shook his head with a sepulchral “Wait and see.” Heavens, how I detested the man at that time! Regularly three times a week, and sometimes more, his cart went to the station laden with cases of pineapples, while I bent more assiduously over my strawberry beds and gnashed my teeth.

He was right. I waited and saw—that the bunches of miniature bananas grew no larger, and finally turned an ugly shade of brown and rotted off the plants. Strawberries fell to glut prices. The paw paws, as predicted, turned out to be eighty per cent males, and, woe on woe! my Russian, with the best intentions in the world, “scurried” (deep-harrowed) too close to the roots of the passion fruit vine, which run very near the surface, and they slowly but surely withered.

For six months I battled on, and then placed my "made-to-sell" farm in the hands of a Brisbane firm of estate agents to sell.

During the weeks that followed I saw something of the social life of the neighbourhood, and can only liken it to its English prototype which, when allowance is made for climate and environment, it resembles almost exactly. The gem of the proceedings, however, was when the Governor of Queensland opened the local agricultural show, and the winner in the pineapple section drove home in evening dress and brilliant sunlight, seated on the first prize, a sack of artificial manure !

Then, on one occasion, in the train going to Brisbane, I had the doubtful privilege of hearing myself discussed at length by the local school-mistress and the store-keeper's wife, neither of whom I had had the pleasure of meeting.

"But who is he ?"

"An Englishman."

"Oh." This as though it accounted for anything.

"Very wealthy I've heard, and eccentric, very. He picks strawberries in his pyjamas. Yes, it's a funny hobby, but—— Yes, I'm afraid so—— No, beer. They say he gets through a keg a week ; yes, quite young ; isn't it a pity ? So many of them do. Yes, it is strange—Russian, I think ; they say it's so that they can't understand his awful language and goings-on. Oh, yes, I hear—etc. etc., *ad lib.*

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At last there came a day—I have always looked back on it as *the* day which every dog is supposed to have at some time or another—when a gentleman called with a card “to view” from the real-estate agents in Brisbane. I call him a gentleman, not only because he probably had as much right to the title as anyone else, but because his outward appearance gave the impression of a superior funeral “mute,” with the exception of the top-hat, whose place was usurped by a glistening, white solar topee with a green band.

I received him in brown overalls clotted with mud at the knees, a pair of “settler’s boots,” and a blue canvas shirt, and a few minutes later we were seated on the veranda exchanging civilities over a glass of beer. I have since wondered if it was this refreshment, or the fact that he had just arrived from the north of Ireland, that accounted for his extraordinary conduct as a prospective buyer. If the latter, then Heaven send more gentlemen from the north of Ireland !

To begin with, he fell in love with the place and was at no pains to conceal his admiration. It began in rhapsodies over the view, continued during an examination of the soil, and ended during the final inspection of the house. The standing crops seemed a minor consideration.

As we approached the bananas, I prayed that the agitation I felt was not discernible.

“Funny-looking stuff,” he said, prodding a

blackened and half-rotten bunch of bananas about three inches long ; " what are they ? "

I swallowed hard.

" They ought to be bananas," I said, with a sinking heart, " but they were badly planted to begin with, and, as a matter of fact, this isn't the right locality for them. Only sixty miles further north they grow to perfection."

" Ay, to be sure," he murmured sympathetically, " but I was up there three days ago and it wouldn't suit my little boy at all—too hot."

I felt that if my visitor had come to Queensland with the sole purpose of growing little boys, then a " made-to-sell " farm ought to suit as well as any other, but I did not say so, and we passed on to the paw paws.

" Paw paw," he repeated ; " funny name isn't it ? "

I agreed that it was an exceedingly funny name, and was continuing our way to the passion fruit when he called me back to ask the name of the grass which grew in such abundance everywhere. Did I tell him it was the most virulent weed in Queensland ? That it grew along the ground like a vine, taking hold of the earth with roots six inches long, and that if a particle of that root is left in the ground it spreads again like a cancer ? That if it gets a hold on a fruit farm it can ruin its owner, and that I had been unable to cope with it on account of the incessant strawberry picking ? I'm afraid not.

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I merely told him what it was—couch-grass ; and his face brightened at the word !

“ Ay, to be sure,” he said. “ Splendid grazing ; the very best, I’ve been told.”

After a tour of the paddock and bush land, we returned to the house.

“ I can see what it is,” he said paternally ; “ you don’t know how to run the place.” I did not contradict him. “ Now if I had it I’d——” and he launched forth on a detailed account of the transformations he would make in the farm. They sounded very pretty, and I could see the place had gripped him even as it had gripped me ; after all, that is what “ made-to-sell ” farms are intended to do.

“ What do you want for it ? ” he demanded at last, and there is little more to tell. He bought it lock, stock, and barrel, for fifty pounds less than I had the temerity to ask, namely £1400. In six months I had made a clear profit of £150 by the sale alone.

“ George,” I said a few hours later, summoning my Russian into the dining-room. “ Farm finish. No more strawberries, no more packing.”

His handsome face fell.

“ Russia no good,” he suggested sorrowfully. “ All right, Russia go Brisbane.” He always called himself Russia, and he thought he had been dismissed.

“ No, no,” I cried, tapping him on his brawny

chest. "Russia all right. Very much all right. I buy more farm, but no strawberries, no bananas, no passion fruit—pineapples!"

"Jelly good," he said, and grinned from ear to ear.

XXV

PINEAPPLES

WITH the help of my depressing neighbour, and the experiences set forth in the foregoing chapter, I had now "thinned things down" to pineapple growing, and it only remained to find the best locality. This, I had heard, was about sixty miles further north, so, after installing my inestimable Russians in a Brisbane boarding-house, I took train to a picturesque township situated among rolling hills of rich, red earth—the very pick of the Queensland pineapple-growing districts.

Here I took up my quarters in the local hotel, and proceeded to wait and watch. This may sound a rather slothful and unenterprising method of spying out the land, but I have found that it has its advantages. If it once becomes known in a small community that a stranger has arrived with the idea of buying land, all the possible sellers are at once on their guard. They will tell him nothing but the most extravagant stories of the fortunes to be made at the particular industry in which they happen to be engaged; exaggerate the value of land, and generally do their utmost to "hook the new chum."



CLEARING LAND IN QUEENSLAND FOR A PINEAPPLE PLANTATION



A PLANTATION IN BEARING

I have a notion that I was regarded as a cheerful sort of English idiot, spending his holidays by watching others work, and occasionally helping them. In this way I learnt more in a fortnight than I probably should have done in three months by obtaining employment, or openly seeking information with the idea of taking up land.

To begin with, I learnt that nobody was in the least anxious to sell—a healthy sign. That bush land, suitable for pineapple growing, could be had for £10 per acre, but that owing to the dense scrub and gigantic trees, it cost £25 per acre to clear and stump, this bringing the total cost of workable land to £35 per acre. But that when this land *was* cleared and planted to pineapples, and the two years necessary for the plant to bear had passed, the grower could rely on a net profit per year of not less than £30 per acre, and more often £40. That as yet there is no disease known to pineapples, the only thing to affect them being frost, which, of course, can be avoided by selecting the proper locality. That even drought does not affect the pineapple as far as value is concerned, as a great deal of its nutriment is absorbed from the air, and although the fruit is stunted by lack of moisture at the roots, it is still large enough to sell—and sell at necessarily advanced prices during drought time. That the demand in Brisbane, Sydney, and Melbourne, where the growers have selling agents, at present considerably exceeds the supply, and if

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ever in the future it does not, one can always sell to the canning factories, which are only too anxious to increase their output of pineapple preserve. And finally that there is a handsome fortune awaiting the man who discovers a means of getting pineapples from Queensland to England without the fruit going black at the core. Although it is excellent eating in this condition—quite as good as in any other—the class of public who can afford to pay ten shillings for a pine out of season is rather too fastidious to overlook the blemish. The Queensland Government is now engaged in experiments with a view to getting pineapples to England in condition, and there is no reason to doubt that in the end they will be successful. In the meantime, the English market for Queensland canned pineapples has not even been touched, so there is ample room for expansion—when expansion is necessary.

All this was eminently satisfactory, but I began to fear that in such a prosperous locality, it would be next to impossible to buy a farm as a going concern. I had even made up my mind to undertake the more lengthy method of buying scrub land and clearing and planting acre by acre and year by year, when Fortune favoured me—as I am thankful to say she has been good enough to do more than once.

Every evening, I had been in the habit of playing tennis with the sports of the village on an

“ ant-heap ” court belonging to a wealthy grower whom I will call Smith. During the first few days I was in the place he had been away, and whenever I defeated one of the local players—a perfectly simple proceeding, by the way, more on account of their incompetence than my proficiency—they invariably consoled themselves by remarking—“ You wait till Smith comes back ! ”—with a laugh that promised vast entertainment for themselves, and dire results for me. I *did* wait till Smith came back, and thereby, I am convinced, won a farm.

An ant-heap court, made of the disintegrated earth built up into mounds sometimes seven feet high by the Queensland ant, is the fastest and truest I have ever played upon, and the tussle that took place between Smith and myself resembled a duel to the death, with extraordinarily noisy seconds, rather than a game of tennis. My antagonist was a tall, lean man of the true Australian country type, with a terrific reach and a “ smashing ” power that was positively terrifying—but that was all. I soon discovered that if I could preserve my life by keeping out of the way, he would win the game for me himself, and this he did by sending most of his balls out or into the net, and one through his own drawing-room windows. The “ seconds ” cheered these efforts as though they had been the very acme of finish, and whenever I “ lobbed ” over my adversary’s head—tactics

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they evidently regarded as savouring of "pit-pat"—the long-drawn howl which usually accompanies the flight of a rocket went up from the assembled company.

But I won the first set six to two.

The temperature, by the way, was ninety-two in the shade, and my shirt clung to me like a sodden rag. When I had won, by a narrow enough margin to please the "seconds," Smith looked surprised and pleased. He shook me by the hand as though at the conclusion of a boxing contest, and invited me in to afternoon tea.

"I wish you were a resident here," he said, over the cup that cheers. "With you we could give Maryborough the shock of their lives. Then there's Buderim next week—couldn't you wait till next week?"

I, too, wished I were a resident, and thought no harm could now be done by divulging my guilty secret.

"On the look-out for land!" exploded my host. "Oh, good man. Take my word for it you can't do better than here. Come and have a look over the place."

It was a wonderful sight—an undulating sea of pineapple plants in every stage of growth from the tiny "sucker" to the full-grown luscious fruit.

"I have three farms like this," my host explained. "I'm shipping about a thousand cases a week just at present. Much in it? No, except



A LUSCIOUS HEAP

planting right, fertilising right, and keeping the place clean—the pine does the rest. If you hang up a plant on a string in these parts, it will grow. Throw a pine “sucker” on the ground, and it will take root. Pines are a weed ; you can’t kill them without burning them. Give them red, sandy, loam soil, the side of a hill for drainage, and the right climate, and all the trouble you’ll have will be to pick them before they rot.”

On one hill-side a man was engaged planting “suckers” (shoots that grow from the stem of the plant, just below the fruit), in rows thirty feet apart. This is necessary to allow for the rows widening with the years. Each of these will last ten to thirteen years without replanting, and continue throwing out shoots to either side until they form dense mats, with but narrow lanes between.

A little further on, a cloud of red dust showed where a man was harrowing between the rows to kill the weeds. Behind us lay the packing shed, where others were constantly employed packing the pines in wooden cases between layers of dried grass, as they were brought in from the plantation piled high in queer little carts with wide-rimmed wheels to prevent their sinking into the loose earth.

On a distant hill-side they were fertilising—ploughing a single furrow on the upper side of each row of pines, scattering the fertiliser along it, and

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closing it again with the plough, in readiness for the next rain to wash it down into the roots.

Finally we came upon a lonely toiler on the outskirts of the plantation "grubbing" stumps, and a more arduous and monotonous routine than his it would be hard to imagine. The usual procedure in clearing new land is to fell the trees and brushwood, wait for the dry season, and burn it off; but this is by no means the end of the work. The next task is to get rid of the roots remaining in the ground. A number of these are far too large for any kind of "stumping jack" to handle, and have to be got rid of by means of dynamite, fire and pick and shovel, for not a vestige of them must remain when the land is ready for the plough. A steady "grubber" gets one shilling per hour—and earns it.

The pineapple plant never ceases to bear until it dies a natural death—as far as bearing fruit is concerned—after thirteen years or more, and then the grower has but to replant in rotation to keep his plantation always in its prime.

So the work goes on, year in year out, and I stood on the hill-side watching it all with a covetous eye. With my Russians and twenty acres such as these . . .

We were on our way back to the village before my companion spoke again.

"I have an idea," he observed irrelevantly, "I could smash those 'lobs' of yours in time."

" You'd have to stand on the back line to do it," I answered.

" Well, and why not ? "

" Why, then I shouldn't lob."

He digested this as far as the next bend in the winding red road, then stopped abruptly.

" You've got to come and live here," he said firmly.

" There's nothing I should like better," I told him ; " but I'm afraid you're above my head. No one wants to sell anything but ti tree swamp at a reasonable figure, and I don't fancy starting ' bush whacking ' again—I've had quite enough pioneering in my time."

He looked away over the little village nestling in the hills below us, and spoke with a certain reluctance.

" Three farms are a lot to manage."

" They must be," I agreed.

" I was thinking I could let you have seventy acres of the east farm. That would make a clean slice—twenty acres pines and fifty bush. . . ."

Little more need be said. The farm became mine for £1000. I have now had it three years. Last year I was offered £2000 for it, which I refused, and it has never yet failed to bring in £300 per annum *net*.

How often, when sitting on my veranda, looking down the green slopes of my pineapple farm, have I said—" If only I had known of this at the

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beginning. . . .” But, as I have said elsewhere, “if” represents a very small word, and an infinite possibility. Certain it is that if I had “known at the beginning,” these confessions would never have been written.

THE END

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